

grading diversity

by Larry Hovis, CBFNC Executive Coordinator

Strategic planning has been a critical aspect of CBFNC's organizational life since our beginning. In our first dozen years, we developed a new plan every three years. Since then, our staff and councils have developed an annual ministry plan and periodically conducted wider planning dealing with more long-term issues. An important shift in our planning process took place with the development of our 2007-2008 plan. That year's plan consisted of three main sections: a statement of our identity, mission, principles, and values; an annual ministry plan; and a section entitled, "Initiatives Shaping Future Ministries."

The third section contained nine items that CBFNC leadership believed were important to our future. We were unsure exactly what shape they would take or how long would be required to implement them. The first of these initiatives was entitled, "Diversity," and read as follows:

Need – CBF Christians and churches value ethnic, generational and gender diversity in our fellowship. Unfortunately, we are almost exclusively Anglo, women are still under-represented in leadership, especially pastoral leadership, and most adults who are active in our fellowship are middle-aged and older.

Action – The Coordinating Council will appoint a task force to make recommendations for increasing the diversity of our fellowship.

Note that this goal named three aspects of diversity that leaders at the time believed we needed to address: race, gender, and generation. Our first step was to appoint a "Diversity Task Force." That group began its work and soon determined that it could not effectively address all three aspects of diversity named in the goal. Therefore, it would focus on race, specifically the relationship between our predominantly white Fellowship and African-American brothers and sisters, and was renamed the "Racial Reconciliation Ministry Team." A separate task force was developed to pursue ministries with our Hispanic brothers and sisters.

It is now ten years later. Look to the right to see what progress we have made and what challenges remain.

Not specifically addressed in the benchmarks is our church-starting efforts beyond the Hispanic community, which include a multicultural church in Fayetteville, African churches in Charlotte and Raleigh, and a Chinese church in Kannapolis, among others. When it comes to diversity, we are definitely a work in progress. We have come far in ten years, thank God, but we have much farther to go. May our work in the next decade be inspired by the heavenly vision of Revelation 7:9-10:

After this I looked, and there was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, robed in white, with palm branches in their hands. They cried out in a loud voice, saying, "Salvation belongs to our God who is seated on the throne, and to the Lamb!"

PROGRESS SINCE 2007

■ Race

Racial Reconciliation – The Racial Reconciliation Ministry Team has pursued its calling in a variety of ways: holding regional meetings to highlight the issues and bring Baptists of difference races together; leading numerous workshops at the CBFNC Annual Gathering; production of an excellent study course, *The Body of Christ* (www.cbfnc.org/RR); and placing divinity student interns at historically black colleges and universities.

Hispanic Ministry – Our Fellowship hired Hispanic Leader-Coach Javier Benitez who developed CBFNC's Hispanic Network. This Network plants churches, trains leaders, and holds equipping retreats for youth, men, women, and families. Several white CBFNC congregations host and partner with Hispanic congregations.

■ **Gender** – According to *Baptist Women in Ministry*, ordinations of women and women receiving calls as senior pastors are rising across the South, including in NC. In fact, our state leads the way on most of these measures. The number of women serving as staff ministers continues to grow, as do women enrolled in partner divinity schools. In most of our partner schools, women comprise at least half of the enrollment. Women also comprise over half of the CBFNC staff.

■ **Generation** – Though partner divinity schools attract persons of all ages, many are under 35 and have engaged deeply in CBFNC life. CBFNC has also grown an impactful collegiate ministry, partnering with historic Baptist universities and starting campus ministries on non-Baptist campuses. Our gatherings continue to grow younger and more ethnically diverse.

CHALLENGES THAT REMAIN

■ Race

Racial Reconciliation – Our congregations are still predominantly, almost exclusively, white. Far too many of us fail to see the advantages we inherently receive as white persons and we are reluctant to take responsibility for the racial inequities that exist in our communities.

Hispanic Ministry – Though our Hispanic brothers are visibly present at our gatherings, we have not yet learned to relate to them on a routine basis. Our ministries remain mostly separate.

■ **Gender** – While the number of women in divinity schools, church staffs, lay leadership, and CBFNC leadership has risen, women are still a minority in pastoral leadership, and many congregations still won't consider calling a woman pastor. Too often we hear search committees say, "We don't think our congregation is ready."

■ **Generation** – While young Baptist leaders are attracted to CBFNC, most of our congregations are growing older. In many places, we are "old churches with young ministers." Next year, as a follow-up to the 2017 Leadership Institute, CBFNC will be launching the *Growing Young Initiative*, in partnership with Fuller Youth Institute, to address this challenge.