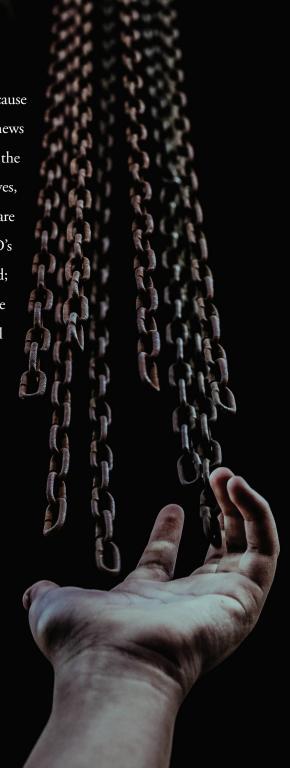
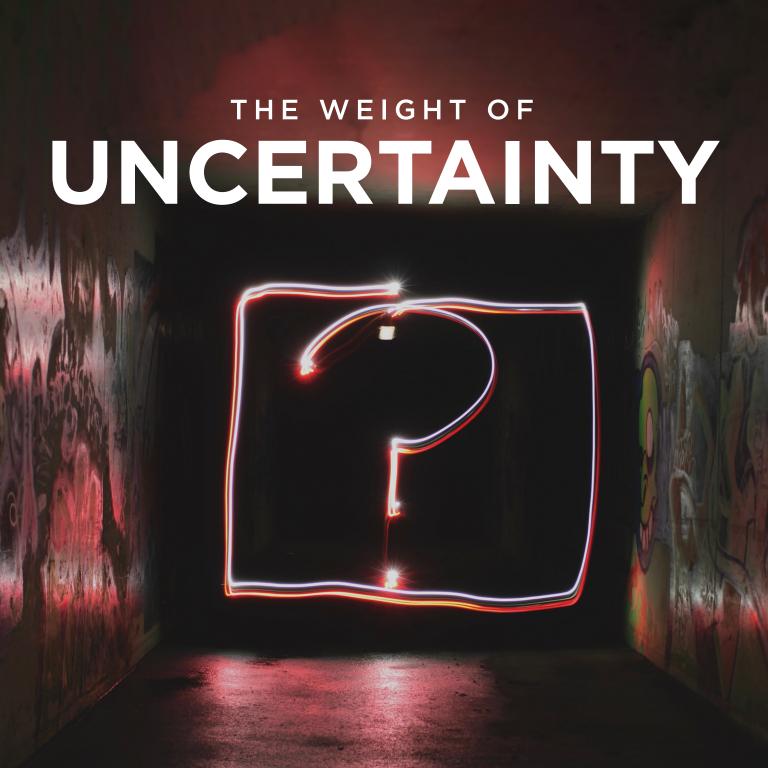
from the 0 2-1 VISION PLEOT MOUNTAIN BAPTIST ASSOCIATION

The Spirit of the Lord GOD is upon me, because the LORD has anointed me to bring good news to the poor; he has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to those who are bound; to proclaim the year of the LORD's favor, and the day of vengeance of our God; to comfort all who mourn; to grant to those who mourn in Zion—to give them a beautiful headdress instead of ashes, the oil of gladness instead of mourning, the garment of praise instead of a faint spirit; that they may be called oaks of righteousness, the planting of the LORD, that he may be glorified. They shall build up the ancient ruins; they shall raise up the former devastations; they shall repair the ruined cities, the devastations of many generations.

ISAIAH 61:1-4, ESV





Who could have imagined this time last year that all of our lives would have been radically altered by an unseen enemy? Who could have predicted that our cities would be submerged into chaos and violence, or that families would be trying to figure out how to work while overseeing their children's day-to-day educational requirements? Our very cohesiveness as a society seems to be under threat. On top of all of this America now seems more politically divided and sociologically fractured than any other time since the Civil War.

In the midst of this confusion and angst churches have been subjected to an extraordinary limitation of their ministries. Most of our churches have done a phenomenal job of initially improvising in the midst of crisis, but there remains a lot of unanswered questions. From processing severe restrictions regarding how many can gather to worship to having to cancel key events, churches are struggling to figure out what do next.

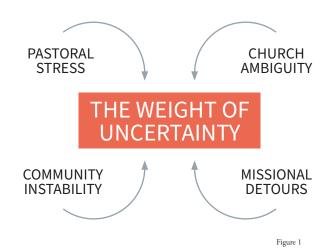
On top of this, pastors have been subjected to new levels of stress beyond their normal duties. More and more families are under a great deal of financial and relational pressure. According to many pastors, this has caused their counseling demands to more than double over a short span of time. Coupled with this is the pressure to make good decisions while interfacing with members who have opposing views about masks, racism, social-distancing and a host of other hotly debated issues.

This crisis has even impacted our collective missional enterprises. Travel bans have halted short-term mission projects. The economic downturn has reduced funding for ongoing and planned church planting strategies. Families that were getting ready to go to a mission field have been delayed and are wondering when they will feel safe and ready to launch a new ministry. Even missional agencies

and conventions are planning for major staff reductions and significant cuts in budgets.

All of these four factors of Community Instability, Church Ambiguity, Pastoral Stress, and Missional Detours combined has created a pressure and a burden that I would call the "weight of uncertainty" that is illustrated in Figure 1.

This weight cannot be ignored. It is forcing us to reassess everything we do. Whether we like it or not, the impact of all of these factors is bringing about rapid and even sometimes frightening changes. In the midst of this uncertainty how should we respond?





It is important for the child of God to remember that even in the worst of times the Lord is still sovereign and is continuing to fulfill his plans. The Scripture at the beginning of this document reflects these realities. It is an OT Messianic passage taken from Isaiah 61 that Jesus quoted in Luke 4 when he preached in his hometown synagogue at the start of his public ministry. It foreshadowed how the Messiah would bring the inbreaking of the Kingdom of God, healing every kind of brokenness that sin had brought into the human experience. This healing would bring about radical transformation, and the people transformed by this work of the Messiah would be used to do the work of restoration in the world.

It is from this biblical framework that we develop our theme for 2021 that we are calling "Up from the Ashes." This theme reflects the idea that God wants his church to experience his restoring power in a new way and take that fresh infusion of spiritual enablement to the lost and broken of our communities. Just like the physical work of rebuilding a pre-existing edifice after a storm, fire or some type of disaster, the PMBA is looking into foundational ways in which we can assist our churches. This renewal looks like Figure 2.

These four key commitments of Community Investment, Church Adaptability, Pastoral Support, and Missional Diversification fit our core areas of ministry focus that we call Community Impact, Church Health, Leadership Development, and Church Planting. As we help churches rebuild, we have realized that it will require us to streamline our approach and pivot our organization in order to double-down on areas that represent these key strategic and foundational commitments.



Figure 2

COMMUNITY

INVESTMENT



If you think of the four sides of the foundation of a building, the first one that represents our core ministry emphases is Community Impact. The first commitment we will make this year through this Focus Group to help churches rebuild their ministries is that we will combat community instability with community investment.

Historically, two of our mainstays in this area have been our Toy Stores and Bread of Life Food Pantry. Over the past year one of the lessons we have gleaned from the pandemic is that your proximity to an area of need determines the exctiveness of ministry to those you are seeking to serve. Due to this we have seen an actual decrease in demand for our direct services through BOLFP, but a growth in the number of people we have served through Toy Stores.

What we have surmised from this insight is that we should continue to shift our focus from doing things for churches and instead doing things through churches. This looks like being more of a resource provider and network facilitator for transactional services that minister directly to the needs of the poor in our communities. When it comes to our Hunger Initiatives, we are going shift our core emphasis from just offering food to helping Gospel-based food pantries with donation of foods and products that will make the local church the hero of community ministries.

The second principle we have learned about community ministry during the pandemic is that our deepest levels of partnership with other ministries will be based on our degree of gospel alignment with them. This means that we initially move from transactional services like feeding people; to transformational interventions where we seek to allow the power of the Gospel to change lives; and finally, to translocational shifts where people who have been transformed by Jesus now engage their communities as missionaries. This approach looks like this:





While we always want to work with local community organizations in helping provide for the basic needs of those in our community, we are going to zero in on partnering more with ministries that are seeking to transfer people from faith in Christ to serving those who used to be in their position.

There are three specific ministries we are plugged into that represent this strategic investment. The first is *Rise Church* led by Joe and Duncan Maye. One of the subsidiary ministries of this new church is *Rise Academy* which provides free private education for underprivileged kids in the Waughtown area. Joe also leads a mentoring/internship program called *Crimson Crown Institute* helping innercity adults become leaders through a holistic approach to discipleship that includes such things as personal finance; job interviewing skills and learning how to share the Gospel.

We also plan to keep backing David and Kathy Parsons ministry in multi-housing units across the city called *Missions Center NC*. The Parsons have been serving as NAMB missionaries providing all types of learning activities for children like sports camps, improving basic reading competency, and lessons in character development. They also plug into families and seek to meet practical needs for those in the poorest areas of our city. Several of our Associational churches have already partnered with them and have benefited by seeing how they can do missions without leaving their back yards.

An additional ministry we are partnering with this year is *Backyard Bible Club* led by Sherri and Rodney Montgomery. It is a ministry that reaches the poor, unemployed and unchurched people in the Germanton area of Stokes County ranging from children to senior citizens. Over the past few years several people have come to faith in Christ and have been baptized at Leak Memorial Baptist Church.

This ministry is helping local churches reach deeply into this community to offer practical and godly assistance to people in various levels of need.

Each of these community-based ministries affords us the opportunity to invest in proven entities that are making a big difference. While we encourage this engagement in ministries like these throughout the year, this coming August we will help our churches focus on their local communities though a missional effort we will call *Missions Blast*. These Gospel-infused approaches to serving our communities also provide us with practical learning labs of how churches can plug in and offer real-time assistance to people. The more churches participate in these compassionate activities the greater their burden for the lost becomes, resulting in more comprehensive missional action.

Finally, with regards to responding to the sin of racism several of our pastors and Associational leaders have been in dialogue with our minority churches and other community leaders to see how the Gospel informs, shapes and empowers us to forge mutually-respectful relationships and confront this evil in concrete ways.

This year we have already initiated Prayer Walks that have been coordinated by Stuart Eaton of St. James Missionary Baptist Church. In 2021 we plan to continue this good work by investing in what we will call Table Talks. These are luncheons in which pastors of all races gather together to discuss how our diverse churches in the PMBA can become better partners in Gospel ministry. It is our hope that through these efforts we will see greater cooperation and collaboration in the future.



The second Work of Restoration is to use church adaptation to counteract church ambiguity. What does this look like? It is not the church compromising its doctrine in order to become more relevant. Watering down biblical definitions of church health will end up taking the church further down the path of ineffectiveness and eventually end in death. The real gist of adaptation is to help churches look more honestly and deeply into their cultures, subsequent practices and cultural challenges to see where they are in terms of overall effectiveness in the mission of making disciples.

Our first effort at doing this was to provide free masks for churches as they began to work through the tedious and complicated process of meeting together. To date we have distributed over 4,000 free masks to churches in our network. We have also served as an advisor to dozens of churches in looking at various options of nationwide best practices for how and when a church should meet together

Part of this will come through providing two free assessments called the *Pastoral Readiness Assessment* and the *Vision Receptivity Assessment*. The PRA is a coaching and development tool that helps pastors see how they are performing in three key areas. The VRA is designed to help churches determine if they are ready for revitalization. Because this involves a lot of hard work and necessary changes in ministry approaches it is important to make sure a church is ready for this significant shift.

If a church is capable and willing, we will plan to help them through a six-month long process called *ReFocus* and will provide a partial scholarship for interested parties. The materials and processes we will use are designed for churches to work on customizing their own individual plans for the hard but rewarding work of moving them back towards the movement of being effective disciple-making entities.

Combined with this approach of assessment and training is a commitment to help leaders and churches do the deep work of spiritual renewal through prayer. Over the last few years, the Church Health Focus Group has offered a yearly Pastor's Prayer Retreat. In 2021 this team will be looking for various venues to help pastors experience personal renewal though dedicated times of prayer which will fuel their efforts at helping their churches revitalize.

Finally, we will be adding a *Technology Team* to our Church Health Focus Group. The purpose of this groups will be "to position the PMBA to enable our churches to pivot from the current contextual challenges by adapting new technological methodologies in their process of building lifelong followers of Jesus in cost-efficient, scalable ways." Craig Clayton has already done some solid work on this for the Association. He will be leading this effort and will help us plan our first ever *Technology Summit* designed to leverage expertise from our churches that are already doing a great job on this to help our other congregations.



Bridging the gap between church revitalization and pastoral renewal is our continuous effort at helping leaders deepen their understanding and application of the Good News to every area of their lives. The Leadership Development Focus Group has sought to do this through large group events like the *Marriage Retreat* and *Pastoral Appreciation Banquet* and the specialized counseling service to pastors and their family members we call *Care-Giver Check-In*. The idea behind these regular offerings is to combat pastoral stress with pastoral support. God willing, we will continue these support strategies again in 2021.

In conjunction with these events we are planning to add three new elements to help pastors experience personal renewal and growth. The first is a new workshop our Executive Director is developing called "*The Resilient Leader*." It is a free one-day seminar that will be offered during the first half of the new year. It will key in on the nine qualities leaders will need to exhibit to not only survive but more importantly thrive in challenging times.

The second new course provided for our leaders is connected to the first. Using "The Resilient Leader" as a launching pad for further development, we will be offering a one-on-one coaching process called Revital-Coach that Walker and Rick Hughes are developing this Fall. This process will expand upon the leadership development training the Executive Director has already created known as The Leadership Loop. Any pastor that wants to expand their leadership capacities can sign up and go through this customized personal development program.

Finally, we are planning to help our pastors and churches find affordable options for marriage and family counseling. We are calling this emphasis *Family Triage*. The PMBA is committed to working with various Christian counseling services in our region to access affordable services. This will serve as a backup so that pastors who are overwhelmed with the increased demands for counseling can find relief while still providing qualified help for their congregations.



The Great Commission leaves no provision for ceasing our obedience to Jesus due to a pandemic or social unrest. For over 2,000 years the Holy Spirit has been moving across the earth through the church to bring people into the family of God. This means that despite the unique challenges facing us these days, we need to look for new ways to do the work of the church. That is why we are choosing to use missional diversification to counteract missional detours.

How does this work? For starters we are happy to announce the launching of a new church planting residency program called *The Church Multiplication Initiative*. This church planting residency program is being birthed out of a partnership between the PMBA and the national missional agency Christ Together. TCMI will involve a nine-month assessment and training process designed to assist our churches in identifying, equipping and placing church planters in local areas and beyond that need a gospelinfused, disciple-making presence. This will embrace multiple models of church planting to ensure that we don't limit God's work in God's ways.

The second aspect of missional diversification will be to double-down on helping dying churches replant or relaunch. We call this process *Re-Forge*. Whether it is a merger of two existing congregations or a full restart, the idea is for a faithful group of saints to sacrifice their comfort for the greater good of seeing a fruitful gospel presence continue in their area. This is not easy to do. There are a number of sacrifices to be made. But the alternative of losing a witness in a neighborhood is worse.

With all the incontrovertible factors of Community Instability, Church Ambiguity and Pastoral Stress facing us due to COVID-19, it is incumbent upon churches to not keep meeting out of a sense of self-protective reactivity but to imagine what new things God can do through a yielded group of people. The Association is ready to help facilitate this movement toward fuller missional engagement through replanting.

DETOURS

We are indeed living in unprecedented times. The multiple challenges associated with our current context will require unparalleled faith. To walk by faith will necessitate that we see obstacles and seeming dead ends as unexamined opportunities for more effective ministry. Whether we like it or not, there is little room to do less.

The PMBA is eager to embrace these opportunities with our member churches. It is incumbent upon you to pray and seek out partnerships that will help fuel what you believe God is calling you to in times like these. Our prayer is that we will remain a trusted advisor and partner for such important work. Thank you for your support and we look forward to what God will do in and through us in 2021.



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