

Cullendale First Baptist Church exists to make and mature disciples of the Lord Jesus Christ. That's our mission statement. So, our mission is clear. Our fellowship is strong. Our staff is capable. Our future is bright.

This does not mean we are not facing challenges. We are. Nothing worth doing is without struggles. I choose to be like Caleb in the days of Joshua. He chose to face challenges, not run from them. Joshua 14:12 reads, "Now then, give me this hill country about which the LORD spoke on that day, for you heard on that day that Anakim were there, with great fortified cities; perhaps the LORD will be with me, and I will drive them out as the LORD has spoken." Caleb and Joshua were promised this land because of their faithful report and trust in the Lord when faced with the initial challenge of taking the Promised Land. Caleb didn't back away. At the age of 85 he still wanted to face a challenge head on. He trusted God to give the victory. Fortresses and giants fall, as God's people trust Him for victory.

Tonight, I call upon you to join me in trusting the Lord for victory over all challenges in 2017.

Now, I will outline some challenges I want us to meet in this New Year.

1. PRAYER: We can do nothing apart from prayer. We will continue to pray each week for revival and spiritual awakening. We will continue to kneel before the Lord in our corporate worship services. We will continue to pray each Wednesday morning at 10 in the conference

room. We will continue our men's prayer group each Sunday morning at 8:30 in my office.

2. **DISCIPLESHIP:** We will continue our chronological study of Scripture in Sunday School using The Gospel Project materials. We will continue offering Midweek Bible study options. Our newest slate is on your announcement sheet tonight. We will attempt to implement a comprehensive discipleship process using The Disciples Path/The Journey materials, which is a 52-week study, designed to make and mature followers of Jesus. Bro. Michael is looking for ways to do discipleship with our teens.
3. **EVANGELISM:** Bro. Clay has developed a new Reaching Out ministry to be implemented through the Sunday School. He has placed wall pockets in adult classrooms that contain names of prospects and inactive church members. The goal is for someone to take one of those names and make contact with them by card, by phone call, or by personal visit. We hope to offer some personal witnessing training this year, possibly on Wednesday nights as one of our Midweek Bible studies. Personally, I am going to do some door-to-door visitation in selected neighborhoods this year. I would like to have some men who would join me in that.
4. **MISSIONS:** We will continue our support of Andy Brown and The Landing Church Seattle. We plan to take a group to Seattle this July 1-6 to assist

that church's outreach into its city. We have a group going back for the FAM meetings in Thailand this summer. We understand that it is not too late to participate in this trip. More information is available on tonight's announcement sheet. I would like for us to investigate an opportunity to partner with a church planter in Arkansas, as well as finding a local congregation we can assist in revitalizing or replanting. A replant is taking a church building belonging to a dying congregation and re-starting the church with a mission to reach those in its immediate vicinity.

5. **YOUNG FAMILIES:** We are ramping up our ministries to young families as well. Mark and Amy Hixon are now leading our Adult 1 Sunday School class. We hope that having a young couple leading that group will reap good dividends. David and Teresa MacLeane are doing a great job in ministering to college students. They have good-sized group each Sunday. Lindsey Wilson and our Children's ministry sub team is planning new events and reshaping old one's to minister to our kids. Brave Cave, a winter 1 night VBS, occurs later this month. We hope it generates a lot of interest and prospects. Bro. Michael and I have discussed the need to do more to minister to and reach out to more teenagers and their families. He has a pretty good number of students each Wednesday night. He is emphasizing Sunday church

attendance to them as well. The majority of our Midweek Bible studies are geared toward younger families who bring their children and teens to Wednesday night activities. We hope they will stay and take part in these offerings.

6. **WORSHIP:** Bro. Clay continues to blend a variety of music styles into worship each week. We really need help in the audio-visual booth on Sundays because we need assistance in making sure our radio broadcast and live streaming on the internet are broadcasting. We also need help on the computers to run announcements, song lyrics, and sermon notes. More singers are needed in the choir, and additional instrumentalists are needed as well.
7. **MINISTRIES:** I hope to involve more people in the jail ministry, the Ruby Snider Center, the Christian Health Center, the HUB, Habitat for Humanity, and other local ministries. The Ruby Snider Center is in need of some structural repairs that we could possibly fund. Beech Springs Camp is always in need of volunteers and funds for updating and maintaining its facilities.
8. **FINANCIAL STEWARDSHIP:** Our church may be in the best financial condition in her history. We have no outstanding debt! We finished 2016 with approximately \$558,500 in the bank! Of that amount approximately \$431,600 is undesignated! If we hold a 3 month reserve of \$150,000 that leaves us with \$240,000 we can use for ministry

and missions. The Lord gave us these funds to use not to sit in a bank and draw interest! We must invest them into missions and ministries. Many of the initiatives I have mentioned tonight could be funded with this money. Of course we want to spend it prayerfully and wisely. We will do so as long as I remain your pastor.

9. STAFF: 2016 was a hard year on your staff. The year began with Bro. Michael's health issues that led to a one-month medical leave. Bro. Clay's heart and other procedures have sidelined him more than he will admit. As for me, I must confess that I am tired. The emotional, physical, and spiritual drain on me in 2016 related to the number of deaths and serious illnesses as well as assuming additional staff and associational responsibilities have left me drained. Honestly, I may be experiencing some health issues related to this right now. We don't anticipate that they are serious, but they underscore that some things must change. I realize that change begins and, ultimately, ends with me. With this in mind, we really need to add a part-time associate pastor to our staff to assist in ministering to the needs of our congregation. This past year, we missed some ministry opportunities because we were stretched thin. Our deacons have done a lot this year to help, but people still want and need a staff pastor to serve them in a time of need. The Leadership Team discussed this on Sunday afternoon, and the Personnel Committee will be

consulted in the very near future concerning this. Of course, the final decision on this matter rests with you, the congregation.

Conclusion: We are Baptists. As Baptists we are people of the Book: the Holy Bible. We are also congregational in government. You will ultimately decide how we respond to these challenges. That's the way it should be. Please covenant with me tonight to pray over these matters.

Caleb did not flinch at the challenges before him in his inheritance from God. I trust we will not flinch either.

May God bless you, and may God bless Cullendale First Baptist Church!