

Canton First Methodist Church

Vision Discernment for Pastoral Succession

Purpose:

These questions are designed to guide Canton First Methodist Church's leadership through a prayerful, Spirit-led process of vision clarity and pastoral succession planning. These questions will help us discern where God is leading our church and what kind of leader is needed for the next season of ministry.

1. Kingdom Identity Questions

How has God uniquely wired Canton First in terms of people, place, and passion?

The forefathers of CFMC first established a church here in 1842. Seeing the needs within the community, they established a school to educate the children and were the first to start a Sunday School program in Canton. The church was steadfast and strong in the heart of the city until they outgrew their facilities and moved to the present location in 1992. "The Walk" from the old location to the new signified that the church is the people, not a building. Seeking to be good stewards of their resources, while at the same time anticipating that God would continue to grow the church, the current facilities were built in three stages. Though the church has continued to reach out to our community with the love of Christ through missions, benevolence, and "sending" leaders to serve in outside ministry organizations, we have felt a renewed missional urgency that birthed the church 183 years ago. Over the last year and a half, we have regained our passion and feel our calling to become a regional, equipping church. This is best described with the three words Glorify, Amplify, and Multiply. We feel God calling us to glorify Him in EVERYTHING we do, amplify that anointed message He has entrusted to us, and become a church that multiplies – making disciples who make disciples and planting churches who plant churches.

The scripture verses that best define our call are:

- *Because we loved you so much, we were delighted to share with you not only the gospel of God but our lives as well. 1 Thessalonians 2.8*
- *So Christ Himself gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the pastors and teachers, to equip His people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ. Ephesians 4.11-13*
- *"For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life as a ransom for many." Mark 10.45*

Our mission statement was derived by understanding the three factors – People, Place, and Passion – that come together to make Canton First unique and describe our part of God’s redemptive story. This is sometimes called a “Kingdom Concept” and is articulated as:

Canton First United Methodist Church exists to glorify God and multiply disciples by training and equipping Christ-following SERVANTS who are LAUNCHED to SERVE others in a community that is seeking a HOPE-FILLED LIFE; this life is found in IDENTITY, PURPOSE, and BELONGING in Christ; we serve others with a deep passion for MEETING PEOPLE IN THEIR PLACE OF NEED and EMPOWERING them to live in a LIFE-GIVING RELATIONSHIP WITH CHRIST.

What distinct spiritual gifts, resources, and influence has God entrusted to us?

Over the last seven years God has entrusted to Canton First a unique measure of spiritual gifts, resources, and influence for the building up of His Kingdom. He has assembled an amazing staff and lay leadership team whose individual giftings, abilities and passions coalesce into more than the sum of the individuals. He has brought together a congregation rich in gifts of leadership, teaching, mercy, generosity, and hospitality. He has blessed us with facilities, financial provision, and a growing family of disciples ready to serve.

He has positioned us as a regional church with a voice that carries across our community, conference and denomination. Our leaders are keenly aware that these gifts are not for us alone; they are for the good of others, so that the love of Christ may be proclaimed, the body of Christ strengthened, and the mission of Christ multiplied. We realize that we are stewards, not owners, called to use what He has placed in our hands to glorify Him, to amplify the message of the Gospel, and multiply disciples.

In what ways are we already a pacesetting, empowering church? How do our partnerships, facilities, and regional reach position us as a multiplying force in North Georgia and beyond?

Canton First has influence across the North Georgia Conference of the GMC. Our pastors and leaders amplify the anointed message God has given us in numerous ways – our pastors and laity serve on various leadership committees and boards of the Conference, our lead pastor served as the first Conference Superintendent as the NGA Conference was being formed, we have trained churches on the one board model of governance, we have partnered with two other GMC churches in Cherokee County to help them be more effective, and our pastors and staff advise/coach/consult with other pastors and church leaders in various capacities.

2. Current Reality Questions

What is most vital and Spirit-filled about our current ministries?

We are experiencing a Holy Spirit led renewal and awakening across our ministries. God is bringing new families and persons to worship with us weekly, and those people are being transformed and submitting their lives to Christ. We regularly hear people say, “I can feel the Holy Spirit here.” Our preschool ministry has become a conduit for more and more young families to connect to our church. Missions, discipleship and family ministries are more focused

and becoming more effective. We have birthed new ministries to widows, grandparents, and young adults.

We discerned that God would bring 100 next-generation families to our church in 5 years, but He is well ahead of that pace. While there is not empirical evidence to prove it, the average age of our congregation has decreased by ~15 years.

What challenges or obstacles must we acknowledge as we prepare for new leadership?

Based on research with other pastors who have successfully navigated succession, there are several potential challenges/obstacles:

Relational Transition

- *Loss and Grief Dynamics – some members will feel a sense of loss and uncertainty, especially given all the major events we have been through together over the last 7 years.*
- *Relational Loyalty – Some individuals may have tied their engagement more to the pastor personally than to the church's mission, making it harder for them to connect quickly with the next pastor.*

Vision and Mission Continuity

- *Mission Drift Risk – Without intentional alignment, the church's clearly defined mission and disciple-making strategy could lose momentum or be altered too quickly.*
- *Vision Ownership – If the vision is perceived as “the pastor’s vision” rather than “our church’s vision,” the congregation may not fully carry it forward.*

Leadership and Staff Alignment

- *Team Dynamics – Staff may struggle to adjust to a new leader’s style and approach.*
- *Retention Concerns – Some staff or key lay leaders could consider leaving if they feel uncertain about the future.*
- *Role Clarity – Transition seasons can create overlap, confusion, or gaps in ministry responsibilities.*

Congregational Unity

- *Change Resistance – A new pastor will inevitably bring different ideas, and some members may resist change, especially if it feels “too soon” or “too different.”*
- *Generational Perspectives – Different age groups may have conflicting expectations of what the new pastor should prioritize (e.g., tradition vs. innovation).*

Spiritual and Missional Momentum

- *Multiplication Focus at Risk – Our current push toward being a multiplying, disciple-making church could lose energy if the new pastor is not equally passionate and aligned.*
- *Generosity and Stewardship Impact – Giving patterns sometimes dip during leadership changes if confidence in the future wanes.*

Search and Selection Process

- *Unrealistic Expectations – The congregation may expect the “next pastor” to be just like the previous pastor or to “fix everything” immediately.*
- *Candidate Fit Challenges – Finding a leader who is both aligned with our theological convictions (Wesleyan, GMC) and equipped to lead a large, regional, multiplying church can be challenging.*
- *Discernment Fatigue – If the process is lengthy or unclear, it can create frustration and erode trust.*

Timing

- *Overlap – Too short of an overlap may create a rushed handoff; too long may cause confusion over who is truly leading.*
- *Strategic Planning Alignment – Ensuring that key initiatives (like facility expansion and next-gen family outreach) are at stable stages during the changeover.*

How are we currently living into the vision of reaching the 100 next-generation families that God has promised?

First and foremost, we acknowledge that it is God who is bringing the new families and people and that our role is to be ready to receive them and disciple them. Some of the actions we are taking to facilitate this are:

- *Addition of the Wesley Wing to expand children, youth and adult discipleship spaces.*
- *Starting a young-adult ministry with seasoned, Jesus-loving people.*
- *Implementing our discipleship process of Abide, Become, Do and Multiply that also has measurable components to evaluate effectiveness.*

Are we structured and staffed for multiplication of disciples, leaders, and churches?

Many of the above actions are part of discipleship multiplication as they touch all ages and generations. The next step for multiplying disciples is to birth discipleship bands who multiply themselves.

We have laid the foundation for leadership multiplication within the Ministry Leadership Team, but it is in the very early stages.

For church multiplication we have sought out and started missional partnerships with other GMC churches in Cherokee County and are exploring ways to multiply churches internationally. There is unlimited potential here.

How do we prepare our congregation, leadership, and systems to receive and follow the next senior pastor?

To prepare Canton First to receive and follow the next senior pastor we must:

- *Prepare the congregation by inviting them into prayer, framing the transition biblically, celebrating the past, and reinforcing vision ownership at every level.*

- *Prepare our leadership by strengthening our alignment to the vision and mission and clarifying each member's roles in the transition and beyond.*
- *Prepare our systems by thoroughly documenting our mission and vision, stabilizing current and near-term initiatives, and providing clear governance.*
- *Prepare spiritually by covering the process in prayer and leaning into renewal.*

3. Future Calling Questions

What does it look like to glorify, amplify, and multiply in the next 3–5 years?

Glorifying God in all that we do is the basic and ongoing mission of every person created in God's image, and by extension, the foundational mission of the church. However, as fallible people and an imperfect church living in a broken world, we must continually remind ourselves and come back to this calling.

Three years ago, a group of CFMC leaders discerned that God has entrusted to us an anointed message in the preaching, teaching, leadership, and administration of the church that must be stewarded and shared with other churches, pastors and leaders. In three to five years, Canton First will be a regional church that is helping to shape and lead the GMC in the North Georgia Conference and beyond, as God leads us.

Multiplication of disciples and churches is the most recent calling our leadership has felt. In three to five years, we will be a church filled with disciple-makers who are making disciple-makers to the 4th generation. We will have started a network of missional partnerships with other churches and new church starts.

What catalytic opportunities is God opening that require courageous, faith-filled leadership?
The results of glorify, amply and multiply outlined in the previous question are only possible because the Lord has led us to a new denominational movement that empowers and releases the local church to live fully into God's calling. The times we are in MUST be faced with courageous, faith-filled leadership, or we will become just another religious institution.

How might the Spirit be calling us to take bold steps of faith that stretch us?

The evidence of the Spirit is most clearly seen in the aftereffects of faithful steps. Some of the things we have seen are unity within the church as we discerned future affiliation, stepping out in faith to remodel our youth and children's areas after God's promise to bring 100 next-generation families, and the generous response of our people as we move to make room for more children, youth and adult discipleship. It will take this same bold faith as individuals courageously answer the call to ministry and as we equip and send people to start and strengthen churches.

What next-level fruitfulness do we sense God wants to bring in worship, discipleship, mission, and multiplication?

We will see the people of Canton First living into abiding, becoming, doing and multiplying as they discover and operate within their spiritual giftedness, embracing the full array of spiritual gifts. We will make disciples who make disciples to the 4th generation and beyond so that it will become a part of our culture and DNA. We will see the churches of Cherokee County working together to realize God's kingdom here on earth.

4. Next Pastor Profile Questions

What spiritual gifts, experiences, and leadership qualities are essential for our next pastor?

Essential Spiritual Gifts

The next lead pastor will need to embody and model certain spiritual gifts in order to shepherd Canton First into its next season of glorifying, amplifying, and multiplying:

- *Leadership – to cast compelling vision, align people and resources, and steward the congregation's influence regionally.*
- *Teaching – to ground discipleship in biblical truth and equip people for generational multiplication.*
- *Evangelism – to continue reaching the next generation of families and creating a culture where people encounter Christ and are discipled into maturity.*
- *Wisdom and Discernment – to guide decisions in times of complexity, balancing continuity with Spirit-led innovation.*

Vital Ministry Experiences

Because of Canton First's history, present reality, and future calling, the next pastor should have demonstrated experience in:

- *Cultivating disciple-making cultures, birthing new leaders, and partnering in church planting.*
- *Stepping into established ministries, helping people process grief, and building trust without losing momentum.*
- *Familiarity with serving beyond the local church in equipping, training, or coaching roles; ability to steward Canton First's role as a pacesetting, empowering church in the GMC.*
- *A proven record of reaching and discipling young families while honoring older generations.*
- *Fostering environments where the Holy Spirit's presence and power are evident in worship, mission, and discipleship.*

Critical Leadership Qualities

The qualities of the next pastor must align with both Canton First's DNA and its future trajectory:

- *Able to embrace Canton First's vision and mission and articulate it in a way that ensures continuity and ownership by the whole church.*
- *Not a solo visionary but a leader who equips, empowers, and releases staff, lay leaders, and members to serve in their spiritual gifts (Ephesians 4:11–13).*

- *Willing to lead boldly in uncertain times, take Spirit-led risks, and model dependence on God.*
- *Embodying Mark 10.45, leading with a servant's heart and resisting the temptation to build a personality-driven ministry.*
- *Able to withstand the pressures of transition, conflict, and change while staying rooted in prayer and abiding in Christ.*
- *Carrying the same urgency that birthed the church in 1842, with passion for reaching people in their place of need with the hope of Christ.*

How should the next pastor's passion align with our vision foci: Glorify, Amplify, Multiply?

The next lead pastor must have a deep, personal passion for the glory of God in all things, demonstrated in preaching, worship, discipleship, mission, and even administration. Their ministry should reflect God-centeredness over performance-driven ministry, with humility and a servant's heart (Mark 10.45) that cultivates an environment where people encounter the presence of God through prayer, worship, the Word, and sacrament. They must model abiding in Christ, set a tone of reverence and joy in worship, and keep the church oriented toward God's glory rather than personal or institutional success.

The pastor should be passionate about proclaiming the Good News with clarity, boldness, and relevance. Their preaching and teaching must be Spirit-anointed and biblically rooted, equipping the saints while speaking into the real needs of the community. They should carry a passion for equipping others (staff, lay leaders, and everyday disciples) to also amplify the message, not keeping the voice of the Gospel confined to the pulpit.

The pastor must have a multiplying mindset, believing that the Gospel spreads best through everyday disciples who make disciples. Their passion should be to see the congregation equipped and released into generational disciple-making (to the 3rd and 4th generation), not simply to grow attendance or programs. They should love investing in leaders, developing staff, raising up future pastors, and planting or strengthening churches. They must carry urgency for evangelism, joy in discipleship, and courage to step into multiplication.

This passion alignment ensures that the pastor is not simply a caretaker of the current ministry, but a Spirit-led catalyst who will carry forward Canton First's anointed call to be a regional, equipping, multiplying church.

What non-negotiables should guide the pastoral search (e.g., theological alignment, leadership style, relational capacity)?

The next lead pastor must be a Spirit-anointed, Wesleyan disciple-maker and servant leader who is:

- *Theologically grounded and aligned with the GMC.*
- *Passionate about multiplication at every level – disciples, leaders, and churches.*
- *Experienced in large-church leadership with a proven equipping and sending mindset.*

- *Rooted in humility, integrity, and resilience.*
- *Relationally skilled at shepherding through transition and uniting generations.*
- *Unselfishly committed to raising up next-generation disciples.*

What current strengths or gaps in the staff team will shape the kind of leadership we need?

Our current staff is well-balanced in many ways.

- *We have a healthy mix of the five-fold office spiritual gifts – apostle, prophet, evangelist, shepherd, teacher – that equip the church to do ministry*
- *We have a mixture of skill levels, experience and maturity.*
- *We are representative of the age demographic of our community.*

Our team works best in a collaborative environment where each team member is equipped, empowered and expected to carry out their ministry effectively.

Some of our growth areas as a team are:

- *Embracing conflict in a healthy, life-giving way*
- *Peer-to-peer coaching*