



Greetings my fellow Ebenezerites!

2023 proved to be a year of challenge and a year of change. God tested us in the previous year to see, I believe, if we would dare to stay the course. There were many challenges in the culture and shifts in the community, but I believe that because of a strong commitment to the word and to our chief aim to serve in a four-fold manner (the Christ, the church, the community, and the culture), that the Lord was honored and creditable ministry went forth.

Reviewing some of the highlights and accomplishments of 2023 makes my heart leap with praise because they are empirical proof that the Lord was and is leading us to be a "great church" because we serve.

Praise God for 48 new members who were added to our membership (36 adults and 12 youth). We also praise God for 13 new converts who surrendered their lives to Jesus Christ. This past year we recorded one of our highest baptism rates since my becoming the pastor - 12 persons were baptized!

This past year was the year of the "Re-launch" where we made strides in bringing back online ministries that were dormant due to the pandemic. Thank God for the assistance and the leadership of our Director of Ministries, Reverend Mills, our Youth Ministry, Nursery Ministry, Children's Ministry, Missionary Ministry, Evangelism Ministry, Men's Ministry, and our Choir Ministry, among others, were relaunched. Other ministries that functioned during the pandemic were revitalized and new life was breathed into them giving them a fresh wind. God blessed us to reach out and serve the community in various ways as well to be global mission focused. New volunteers were recruited to help carry the load of ministry and new opportunities were taken advantage of to be an authentic presence of Jesus while serving this present age.

The Lord blessed us to be liberal in our reaching out to help others, be they individuals with various needs, local schools, nonprofits that serve the wider community, or global mission efforts.

This year was our fifth year of being a recipient of an educational grant through the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction to provide academic assistance to our elementary students in selected Title I schools. This past year we received \$500,000.

We also were the recipients of a \$40,000 CBD Grant through the City of Burlington to enhance our 740 Apple Street property as we prepared it for our Social Service Ministry Center.

God blessed us to partner with community agencies to host and provide needed services for the community such as ABSS, United Way, the LatinX Education Center, Cone Health Impact Alamance and others. Because of our engagement with the community we were able to use the Jordan Sellars property as an extension of our programming for youth enrichment.

The ECCO building continues to serve the church in various ways and is also one of the venues for the county to be used as a hub for community and spiritual services and programs. It is also used for recreational and other functions. This past year, the ECCO center alone brought in approximately \$4,120.21 in income. I am thankful for Sisten Amy Harris who serves as our Director of Recreation and Leisure and also as the ECCO Director, giving leadership to the center.

Brother Emehel along with the Trustees have continued to provide good leadership in the maintenance, security, and the general welfare of all of our properties. This past year, LED lights were installed in the ECCO and we were able to place a brand new HVAC system, replacing the original units in the kitchen and the ECCO. Our rental properties received the proper repairs and we turned these over to BBC Parker (Redstone) Properties for management. The final item from our renovation campaign was completed with the installation of the box sign and the installation of the glass doors in the sanctuary and may I thank again all of those of you who contributed to the renovation campaign. I believe the foyer space is beautiful and it definitely adds aesthetically to our welcoming area! We also approved and purchased two pre-used vans and two of our high mileage vehicles.

2023 was indeed a year for the records!

2024 - Moving Forward: Committed to Grow More in 2024

As we enter into this new year I sense an even greater burden to move us toward growing in the four ways that Jesus grew as stated in Luke 2:52. "And Jesus grew or increased in wisdom (mentally), stature (physically), in favor with God (spiritually), and in favor with people (socially)." Growth can be a painful experience, but it is a part of the process of being all that God has designed us to be. We are called to grow up into Him who is the head of the body, and such growth demands that we put away childish, selfish attitudes and actions. We are to ground ourselves both as a church and as individuals in the Word of God and be led by the Spirit of God. Our witness, worship, and work are to be grounded in the Word of God. So the goal is for each of us to pray discerningly about what areas in our lives that we sense the Lord telling us to grow in and then with the aid of the Holy Spirit, get buddy in moving forward to do so. This call for growth is not only an individual call, it is a call and a charge to Ebenezer as a church. With that in mind, I present to you my fellow Ebenezerites, our 2024 Vision. Keep in mind this is not an all inclusive plan, the Holy Spirit is allowed to make any edits He wants to!

Scriptures: Matthew 22:37-40 and Matthew 28:19-20

1. Worship - Liturgia Exodus 20:18

- a. The emphasis of this year's sermon series will focus on growing in twelve specific areas - so that by year's end we can present ourselves to the Lord as a more mature, Biblically driven, and focused people.
- b. By February 1st, hire a Minister of Worship & Arts to direct and oversee our total worship experience.
- c. Evaluate our worship ministry to ensure that it is excellent in all facets of its execution
- d. Launch or assist in launching an alternative location to provide a congregational setting for growth in worship.
- e. Reach through the Word an additional 75 souls for Christ to be added to our membership

2. Fellowship - Koinonia

- a. Continue to foster community through real and felt need classes through iLearn University, small group studies, and Sunday School.
- b. Sponsor a church wide fellowship outing to broaden a sense of community with the wider community.

3. Discipleship - Training - "Didache" Ephesians 4:20

- a. To revise and enhance our approach to Discipleship/New Member Training by June 2024
- b. To begin Youth and Children's Bible Study by May 2024
- c. To start an Iron Sharpeneth Iron group for men
- d. To restart the College & Careers Ministry by May 2024
- e. To start a Young Adult Ministry by April 2024
- f. To restart our Mentoring Ministries: Girls As Precious Pearls and Boys to Men June 2024

4. Ministry

- a. Evangelism Ministry
- b. Prayer Ministry
- c. Media and Production - We will develop a full media and production team and studio to insure ministry and missions go forth in excellence and proper archives are kept (this will require a stipend employee/director)
- d. Couples Ministry
- e. Fitness Ministry

5. Missions – Matthew 28:19-20

- a. We will formally begin our on-the-ground partnership with So Send I You by sponsoring our own representative(s) to be a part of foreign mission endeavors beginning March 2024
- b. We will continue to be a part of the Feed the Hunger experience as a part of the Martin Luther King Jr. Day of Service
- c. We will relaunch the Hope House for its original purpose of housing persons who have been displaced due to life's circumstances for a period of time. May 2024
- d. We will continue to partner with local and national agencies and ministries to serve the needs of the people.
- e. We will relaunch our Social Outreach Ministry to provide basic needs and assistance to local residents. A \$50,000 grant given by the three state senators will assist us in this venture.
- f. We will apply for the the North Carolina Department of Instruction ELISS Grant of \$500,000 to aid us in housing Champions Academy
- g. We are the recipients of a \$50,000 grant to start Excel Middle School Academy.

1-5 YEAR PLAN

- The Ebenezer Cafe – A place for meditation, relaxing, and a place to fellowship around coffee and smoothies, built as an addition to the church.
- Youth Annex Building – The construction of a prefab building on the 653 Elizabeth Street property to specifically house youth and children worship and activities. This facility can also act as a fellowship hall and meeting space for smaller appropriate meetings and events that will not necessitate the ECCO space.
- To explore building a house or a duplex on Apple Street that will serve as additional rental property to bring in income for the church
- To build affordable housing on the 10 acres of land located in Glen Raven.
- To start Excel Christian Academy Kindergarten as a way of restarting the school.

In the spirit of our 2024 theme – Moving Forward, I offer you this wide ranging vision. Such a bold vision is going to take committee people who walk in faith to move it from print on paper to fulfillment. I invite you to join me and together let's work and watch God give provision for the vision and seed to the sower.

Your Servant,

Rev. Dr. Larry E. Covington