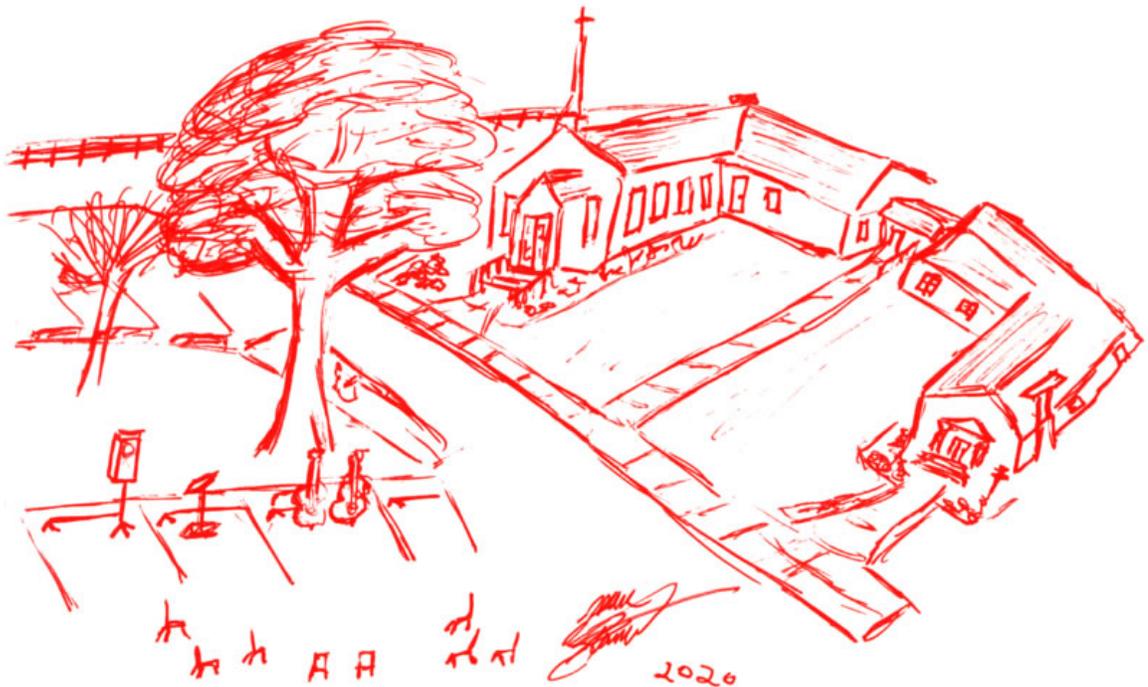


# Ebenezer Presbyterian Church

## Coats, NC



## Mission Study

### 2020

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

MISSION STUDY INTRODUCTION	3
WHO WE ARE	
MISSION STATEMENT	4
EBENEZER (EPC) HISTORY	4
COMMUNITY	8
SERVICES AND ATTENDANCE	8
OUR BELIEFS AND SPIRITUAL PRACTICES	9
STAFF AND LEADERSHIP	
STAFF	11
LEADERSHIP	11
STANDING MINISTRIES AND PROGRAMS	
WORSHIP	12
NURTURE	12
CHRISTIAN EDUCATION	12
STEWARDSHIP	12
MISSION AND OUTREACH	13
BUILDING AND GROUNDS	13
CEMETERY	13
FACILITIES AND FINANCES	
FACILITIES	14
FINANCE AND STEWARDSHIP	14
OUR VISION FOR MOVING FORWARD	
2020 PNC QUESTIONNAIRE	16
STRENGTHS	16
OPPORTUNITIES FOR GROWTH	17
HOPES FOR THE FUTURE IN PARTNERSHIP WITH OUR NEW PASTOR	19
WORKS CONSULTED	21

*Cover artwork by Ebenezer member Isaac Stewart*

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## MISSION STUDY (MS) INTRODUCTION

Writing a mission study is an opportunity to reflect on who we are as a church, identify our strengths and weaknesses, and to bring our future mission and goals into focus. Often this type of study is completed during a transition time for the church, and this is exactly the case for Ebenezer Presbyterian Church. Reflection invites us to look honestly at how change has affected us and how we are no longer the church of 10 or even 5 years ago. Discernment is the challenge to understand and know what God is doing with us and where God wants to take us.

Our Mission Study will serve as an introduction to candidates who feel called to serve as our next Pastor, the next spiritual leader of Ebenezer Presbyterian Church. But the Mission Study will also serve a host of other purposes. It will:

1. Support the work of the pastor nominating committee and educate candidates for the open installed pastor position at Ebenezer Presbyterian Church (EPC). This audience is our primary focus.
2. Serve as a resource for the EPC session as they exercise leadership responsibilities.
3. Encourage and equip members of the congregation to talk openly about the congregation and EPC community and to stimulate thinking about EPC's future as a church of Jesus Christ.

Our Mission Study Team has appreciated the opportunity to engage in this reflection and discernment process. We have come to know and appreciate who we are as a congregation. And we look forward to our future with gratitude and hope, confident that God will lead the right candidate to us to serve as our next Pastor.



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## **REFLECTING THE LOVE OF GOD . . .**

**in who we are.**

### **MISSION STATEMENT**

The mission of Ebenezer Presbyterian Church is to reflect the love of God and serve others to be disciples of Jesus Christ.

Ebenezer Presbyterian Church is a covenant community of Christians who are responsive to God's guidance, redeemed by Jesus Christ, and seek to love and serve one another. We minister to the spiritual and emotional needs of members with joy and enthusiasm.

God's grace is offered through Jesus Christ to everyone as a corporate and individual witness to Jesus Christ through worship, teaching, mission, discipleship and justice. Come and receive the grace of God.

### **EBENEZER PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH HISTORY**

In September of 1919, following a revival in Johnston County, 13 Christians met and signed a petition requesting Fayetteville Presbytery to form a commission for the purpose of organizing a Presbyterian Church in the Tabernacle at Wildwood. In November of 1919, Fayetteville Presbytery responded, and the commission met to organize the church. In June of 1921, church blue prints were purchased for \$15, and in January of 1922, a site and name for the church were chosen—Wildwood.

In June of 1926, Wildwood was in operation, time and date for worship service and Sunday school were set, and by end of the next year, the interior of Wildwood church was completed. But by the end of Dr. Dixon McDonald's ministry (1926-1938), Wildwood was at a stalemate. It was believed that God's Kingdom was to grow and advance. A new location, more centrally situated, was the answer to reaching more souls for Christ. In February of 1935, Mr. and Mrs. Bernard Hudson donated 1.5 acres at Bailey's Crossroads for a new site, and in 1938, a Fayetteville Presbytery Commission met at Ebenezer Mission. Wildwood was moving from its old place of worship to the new site and changing its name from Wildwood to Ebenezer.

After many prayers, lots of benefit suppers, entertainment for an admission fee, harvest sales, donations from businesses, love offerings from businessmen and women, neighbors, pledges of labor and money from its members, one large room with a small vestibule at one end and the pulpit at the other was built. Curtains on supports were used as room dividers, so the sanctuary could serve the two-fold purpose of Sunday School rooms and a place to worship. The new Ebenezer Mission was dedicated in June 1940, and the Rev. C.I. Calcote was pastor.

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The 1940s mark the beginning of a period of expansion, refurbishment, and grounds development to accommodate the needs of a growing church and community. In 1943, a campaign was begun for the construction of Sunday School rooms; in January 1944, a three-member panel was elected to give approval for grave sites in the cemetery and for opening of graves on .35 acres of land which was donated as a love gift from Mr. and Mrs. Bernard Hudson. In 1948, it was suggested that the church should add a steeple and bathrooms. Women of the Church (WOC) was organized and sponsored a very successful Vacation Bible School.

The 1950s saw further work. WOC also set up a fund for donations to purchase carpet. Walls were painted, floors refinished, and drapes were made for the classrooms. Bathrooms were constructed in 1955 after the congregation had voted by secret ballot as to whether the bathrooms should be outside the church or on the inside. To sell old pews and to buy new ten foot pews passed in 1955; discussion on what should be done to the choir loft also occurred in 1955; in 1959, the Men of Church (MOC) was organized, and they erected a lighted church directory. Perhaps most importantly for this period of growth and change, by the beginning of 1959, Benson and Ebenezer had ceased to be Home Mission Churches and began, instead, to be self-supporting churches. Benson and Ebenezer were the first churches in the Fayetteville Presbytery area to become self-supporting in a group apart from a home mission field.



Ebenezer moved into the 1960s with more growth and change. In January of 1960, H. Dewey Herring resigned from Ebenezer and Benson churches to become the first full time minister in the history of the now Ebenezer Presbyterian Church. During 1960, building plans were drawn up for a manse, and once again, church members rallied to the cause. Trustees were authorized to sell the Wildwood (Tabernacle) Church land at public auction. Charter member Mrs. Naomi

Hudson and her son Mack Reid and daughter Mrs. Elizabeth H. Nordan donated 2 acres of land for the manse to be built. Fayetteville Presbytery, through its Barnabas Fellowship, donated \$3000. After friends, relatives, and members of the church reported to the building committee what talents and money they could contribute, work began on the manse in January of 1961. Several months later, a beautiful ranch style home emerged with over 1800 square feet of living space. Rev. Herring and his wife Allie Mae Barnes Herring were the first couple to live in the manse. In 1963, twenty burgundy choir robes were purchased with music holders to match at \$1.25 each. In 1967, a central heating and air system for the church was added with a loan of \$4,300 to pay for the addition.

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As the 1970s opened, Ebenezer continued to refine and build its presence in the community. In 1972, H.L. Sorrell met with church officers and was allowed to pursue the goal of placing a steeple on the church. Leslie Hardison did the wiring for floodlights on the steeple; Bobby Byrd made the attachment so the steeple's cross would be grounded, and the church men rallied to place the steeple on the building. But perhaps one of the biggest changes to the church during the 1970s was the addition of a fellowship hall and educational building. In January 1978, plans were presented for a new educational building and fellowship hall. B.B. Hudson of Erwin gave the needed land for the structure, and on October 1, 1978, the extensive building project was dedicated. In February of 1983, the note burning and the ending of indebtedness for the fellowship hall were held during worship service.

In addition to structural church changes, EPC also realized equipment and member changes during the 1970s. A new piano, Wurlitzer organ and copies of Christian Praise Hymnals were purchased. By 1975, Ebenezer Presbyterian Church had its first woman Deacon in Wynona Ennis. And by October 1978, Wynona Ennis was elected Ebenezer's first woman elder.

By the 1980s, Ebenezer Presbyterian Church was becoming a presence in the community through outreach and fellowship activities. In March 1981, the church sponsored a softball program and used the Red Hill Church ball field for home games. In



November 1983, EPC held its inaugural Harvest Day Sale and Barbecue Plate Sale, an activity that has continuously been a major fundraiser for the church. In August 1983, the entire church body was involved in its first Bible Fest, and in December 1986, EPC opened its doors for its first Hanging of the Greens. From April to May 1988, the MOC sponsored Parent Effectiveness sessions, and once a month, church members volunteered in a Newton Grove clothing shelter and

Newton Grove Clinic. By 1989, EPC was establishing memorial and scholarship funds as well! This former home mission church was truly growing and realizing its vision to reach more souls for Christ.

In the 1990s, EPC was vibrant, continuing to strengthen and expand its internal and outreach programs. The church parking lot was paved in 1991 after many members with trucks and tractors prepared the grounds for paving by Johnson Paving of Lillington. Mary Stephenson spearheaded a monthly 50+ group, open to anyone in the community, with food, fellowship, and entertainment. The first meeting was on February 6, 1991, with homemade Brunswick stew. Another milestone for the church was its incorporation on July 11, 1993. In 1994, a booth was manned at Benson Mule Days, a senior youth group went to Washington, DC, and EPC formed a Kids Club and a Children's Choir. In 1996, the church added carillons, with seasonal and sacred music ringing in the countryside and stained glass windows throughout the sanctuary and

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chancel. 1997 saw the beginning of EPC Children’s Church and the onset of an after-school program tutorial for children and parents in need. Tutors from Campbell University were used. In February of 1999, EPC sponsored an outreach program –Teens as Parents (TAP). The program was organized by Betsy Johnson Memorial Hospital, and the meetings were held at EPC.

And the 2000s saw even more outreach and activity for EPC. In January 2001, EPC opened its fellowship hall to regular meetings of a local Alcoholics Anonymous (AA) chapter. The restructuring of the Board of Deacons was addressed, and in 2002, the office of Deacon was dissolved. The EPC music program received focus with the purchase of a Yamaha clavino in 2002 and 2 octaves of Schulmerich brass handbells rung for the first time on Easter 2003. The congregation attended Camp Kirkwood, and the senior citizens in the church went to the NC State Fair. The church continued to fund Habitat for Humanity, One Great Hour of Sharing, Two-Cents a Meal, TAP, Tri-County Clinic, AA and other local projects.



From its humble beginnings more than 100 years ago, Ebenezer Presbyterian Church has grown into a vital and active church in the community. That vitality and growth continues today. In 2007, the church bus was given by the Charles Denning family, taking church members on trips to Myrtle Beach Christmas shows, seafood fellowship dinners, and even the Southern Supreme Fruitcake Factory! In 2010, the church sanctuary was renovated, and a sound system was added in 2014. The fellowship hall kitchen was renovated in 2015 with a commercial ice

machine and refrigerator, new cabinets, and new flooring. The newly renovated hall has since played host to homecoming luncheons, Easter breakfasts, and many barbecue plate sales. Ebenezer established its Every Woman Encouraged (EWE) Bible study group in 2018, and membership has grown steadily since its inception. 2019, EPC’s centennial celebration year, began with the church hosting an Easter Sunrise service and Centennial Celebration Breakfast—Easter Like It’s 1919. The celebration year concluded with homecoming in October 2019 and the presentation of a memorial flag and certificate from North Carolina Governor Roy Cooper. In 2019, work also began on the church’s main bathrooms to make them ADA compliant. In June 2020, a new EPC bus shelter was dedicated, and EPC also began work on the construction of a Cairn—a mound of rough stones built as a memorial to EPC’s rich and long history. Member families have brought rocks from their farms and fields to be included in this cairn, and construction has begun in 2020.

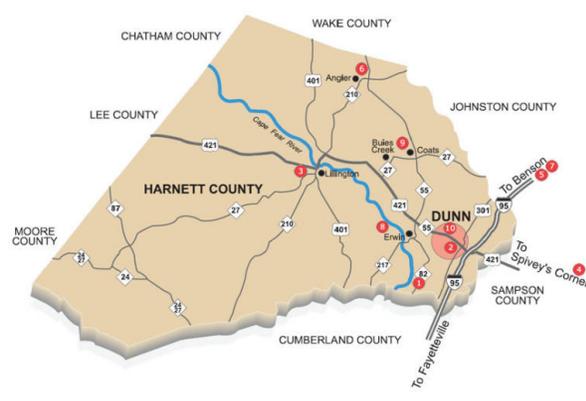
Also in 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic affected the nation, the state, and reached deeply into the church’s ability to deliver services as usual. God gave EPC the strength and vision to rise to the challenge of changing its worship style, continuing to spread the Word in ways it had never undertaken. To respond to North Carolina Governor Cooper’s

executive orders prohibiting mass gatherings, and to accommodate social distancing requirements, EPC began Facebook Live streaming of services on March 22, 2020. No congregants entered the sanctuary. Following a period of virtual services, EPC returned to communal worship with outdoor services on May 17, 2020. Once mass gathering restrictions were relaxed for churches, EPC returned to sanctuary services, with social distancing and facemask requirements, on June 14, 2020, continuing the Facebook Live streaming for those still uncomfortable with returning indoors.

There remains great uncertainty as to what COVID-19 or other forces will affect EPC's walk forward, but our vision is still to grow as a force for God in the community. To quote our 1919 founders, we pray that God will always allow us to reach more souls for Christ.

## COMMUNITY

Ebenezer Presbyterian Church is located in Coats, North Carolina in Harnett County. The area is primarily agricultural and rural with some industry in Coats as well as in the surrounding towns. Coats is approximately 10 miles from the intersection of Interstates 95 and 40, making for a short commute to Raleigh, Fayetteville, Smithfield or even Wilmington! Other growing communities in close proximity include Angier, Benson, Dunn, Erwin, Lillington, and Buies Creek, home of Campbell University.



According to December 2019 census data, Coats has a population of 2368 citizens, reflecting a 12% growth rate over the past decade. Coats married population is 48% of the total; the town has an average family size of 3.8, median age of 30.9, 47% male population, and 53% of the population is female. Coats is 74.7% White, 11.7% Black or African American, and 13.2% Hispanic or Latino. Median income in the Coats area is \$31,667 per worker and \$34,688 per household.

## SERVICES AND ATTENDANCE

EPC currently has 96 active members--35% over age 65, 18% 25 and under, and the balance between 26 – 64 years of age. Our female membership is 58%, and males makeup 42% of the membership. We are a mainly Caucasian church with typical Sunday service attendance from 35 – 50. We have an 11:00AM Sunday service that is traditional with occasional contemporary music. There may also be special music with handbells as well as members sharing their voice and instrument talent.

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We have Sunday School classes held prior to 11:00AM worship each Sunday. They include children and tweens, high school, young parents, and 2 adult classes. Our curricula include “The Young Adventure Bible”, “The Present Word”, and “The NIV Standard Lesson Commentary”. The young parents class bases its curriculum on current issues.

We stream our Sunday services live via Facebook, and we provide post service links to the videos from the EPC website, Facebook page, and YouTube channel.

## OUR BELIEFS AND SPIRITUAL PRACTICES



We are a congregation of God’s people, the body of Christ, who seek to serve God through our church ministries and fellowship. As a part of the PC (USA) and the Presbytery of Coastal Carolina, we are guided in our understanding of the Scriptures by the Book of Confessions and the Book of Order. We, as a congregation, believe that we are called to worship, learn, and serve others, expressing the love of Christ to the world and manifesting the body of Christ to all whom we encounter.

Ebenezer is a theologically traditional church that values its reformed roots. Our church holds two theological beliefs as non-negotiable. First, Jesus Christ is the one and only Son of God; through him alone one can receive salvation. Second, the Bible is the inspired, authoritative Word of God. These foundational beliefs form the basis of our world view which informs, inspires and encourages other theological and ministerial decisions to be openly and scripturally evaluated. We are a church that actively seeks to be obedient to the call of God in all areas of life, faith and ministry. It is our goal to help each member of EPC discover his/her spiritual gifts and to encourage them toward a closer relationship with Christ, reflected in spiritual disciplines and active ministry involvement.

For our worship services, members have expressed the desire for spiritually stirring messages, calling them to action as the hands and feet of Christ. Through our youth programs, we have sought to teach servant leadership, kindness and caring, engaging in local mission projects such as Care Bears for police to carry in their vehicles, “Souper Bowl Sunday” and St. Patrick’s Day potato lunch fundraisers with funds donated to the Coats Soup Kitchen, and Buddy Backpack, filling and delivering book bags with food for school age children. Through our Ebenezer Funds for Christ (EFC), we have supplied food boxes for children and the elderly in need.



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As Jesus said “come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest” (Matthew 11: 28), we have sought to support the bereaved by conducting 2 13-week GriefShare classes per year since 2016.

Jesus tells us in Matthew 18:20, “for where 2 or 3 are gathered in my name, there am I among them;” we have opened the doors of Ebenezer for a community Thanksgiving service, in partnership with other area churches, and we have spread the Word in music through multiple musical events. EPC seeks to learn and grow through Bible and Christian study, establishing the Every Woman Encouraged (EWE) program.

Through worshipping, learning and serving, our members draw closer to God, develop their understanding and live out their faith.



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## **REFLECTING THE LOVE OF GOD . . .** **in staff and leadership.**

### **STAFF**

With allegiance to the triune God, the EPC pastor will provide spiritual leadership, pastoral care, administrative oversight, and organizational direction to an intentionally growing congregation with a broad program of worship, music, preaching, teaching and fellowship. The pastor will serve as Session moderator and will partner with and lead the church membership in establishing a culture of shared responsibility for achieving the church's mission.

The pastor will be called by God to serve in this place and time, will lead with tact and wisdom, and can teach and effectively preach the Word of God. Personal attributes will include integrity, honesty, genuineness, faithfulness, and compassion. The pastor will be open to God's leading in order to impart God's Word in a manner that calls the congregation to worship and serve. The pastor will minister to elderly and young alike and visit the sick, shut in, and bereaved.

Hilda Bailey has served as EPC Music Director as well as music accompanist for nearly 50 years. Her skill, heart and dedication for the music program are evident in her work with the chancel and handbell choirs as well as her faithful planning and direction of annual Christmas and Summer music programs, Vacation Bible School music, Christmas caroling to the shut ins, and other special events.

As current Treasurer at EPC, Cathy Johnson is responsible for disbursements, deposits, and account reconciliations, providing financial reports to the Session. The EPC financial records are audited annually, and an audit report is also provided to the Session.

In the Sexton roll at EPC, John Ennis cleans the church and fellowship hall weekly and monitors and maintains adequate cleaning supplies and functioning equipment. In the Grounds Maintenance roll, Joe Ennis handles landscaping for the church grounds, cemetery, and manse property.

### **LEADERSHIP (Session Members)**

The business of the church is conducted at meetings on the third Sunday of each month and at special called meetings. The Session endeavors to be open and transparent with regard to its management of the church with Session meetings open to anyone interested in attending. There are 6 Elders who serve a 2-year term with every Elder serving as moderator or member of at least 1 ministry program. The ministry programs include Nurture, Stewardship, Christian Education, Worship, Mission and Outreach, Building and Grounds, and Cemetery. Session members also prepare Communion.

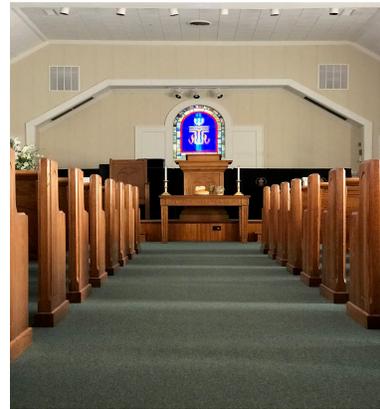
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## **REFLECTING THE LOVE OF GOD . . .** **in standing ministries and programs.**

Through commitment to the Scriptures and the aims of the PC USA, Ebenezer seeks to be a faithful witness. We work to accomplish this through our standing ministries and programs.

### **WORSHIP**

Worship at EPC occurs in a variety of ways—Sunday morning services, Sunday School, Every Woman Encouraged book study, for example. We also hold services during Holy Days such as Ash Wednesday, Maundy Thursday, Christmas Eve, and Easter Sunrise. The Worship team supports the pastor in planning and carrying out our worship services, planning music, logistics, and other special components.



### **NURTURE**

The focus of this ministry team is to care for the congregation and community through acts of love, hospitality, and kindness. This team organizes efforts to nurture those in need through various social events. For example, the team has organized the monthly fellowship “Lunch Bunch”, the annual Fall Harvest plate, craft and bake sale, the Christmas/Birthday /Sympathy card ministry, and the Nurture team has organized cooking teams to serve bereaved families.

### **CHRISTIAN EDUCATION**

This ministry team searches for and manages educational opportunities that bring members and the community closer through Christian study and learning. EPC offers a variety of avenues to encourage members in their faith journey with God. The church offers Sunday School classes on Sunday mornings before worship, the Every Woman Encouraged (EWE) book studies, and Vacation Bible School, to name just a few.

### **STEWARDSHIP**

This team focuses the Church on a spiritual approach to giving to God out of gratitude. As God returns these gifts to us, we use them to do God’s Will through Christ’s church. The team helps to inform EPC of opportunities to extend offerings and other resources to places in need in the community, the nation and the world. EPC believes that utilizing and managing all resources God provides for the glory of God and the betterment of His creation. Some examples of our Stewardship work include One Great Hour of Sharing, Pentecost Offering, and “Cents-ability”, among others.

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## MISSION AND OUTREACH

EPC, with the strength of God’s grace and compassion, boldly embraces new missions to serve our neighbors near and far. The Mission and Outreach team guides this function of the church, seeks out opportunities for the church to serve, and communicates those opportunities through a variety of methods. Some examples of the M&O team’s work include volunteering in the Rise Against Hunger effort for Harnett County, gathering and distributing Care Bears to law enforcement officers, and participating in the Buddy Backpack program, ensuring that school age children have food.

## BUILDING AND GROUNDS



This team oversees the church’s physical resources, focusing on the grounds, the structures, and the manse. Recent work of this group includes resurfacing the parking lot, upgrading the main bathrooms, managing roof repairs, and installing new, smart thermostats for remote HVAC control.

## CEMETERY

The EPC cemetery is situated along the eastern and southern side of the church building. This ministry team maintains cemetery records, works with member families and local funeral homes for interment, and manages the purchase of burial plots for member families. The team also repairs any damage from ground shifts or other natural impacts on gravesites. Most recently, this team updated the cemetery map to accurately reflect the locations and ownership of existing plots.

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## REFLECTING THE LOVE OF GOD . . . in our facilities and finances.

### FACILITIES

The church, parking lot, and cemetery are located on 2.74 acres just outside of Coats, North Carolina in Harnett County. The main building includes the narthex, the sanctuary, 4 classrooms, choir room, pastor study, and small bathrooms. The sanctuary seats 158 congregants and 10 choir members and boasts a recently installed sound system with a mixing board at the rear of the sanctuary. There is playground equipment between the sanctuary and fellowship hall.



The fellowship hall and educational building includes an enclosed hallway from the sanctuary, an additional classroom, nursery, recently renovated main bathrooms, storage room, recently renovated kitchen and an open 1470 square feet with fireplace for fellowship events. It can accommodate up to 82 attendees at any event.

There is 1 main parking lot with 52 spaces, 2 of those as designated handicap parking.

The manse sits on 2.1 acres across Ebenezer Church Road from the EPC parking lot. This residence has 1800 square feet and has a 1 car carport, 3 bedrooms, 1.5 bathrooms, kitchen, dining room, formal living room and a separate family room. The manse has central heating and air conditioning with electric power.

### FINANCES

Ebenezer has a very generous congregation. The operating budget over the past few years has ranged from \$110,000 to \$114,000.

Personnel expenses represent approximately 65% of the total operating budget. Maintenance and operations comprises 32%, and ministry programs receive the balance at 3%.

EPC has a scholarship fund totaling \$12,400 in an interest bearing money market account. Annually, \$500 of the scholarship fund is awarded to a member of the church engaged in an education or development program. The potential recipient must submit an application and essay to the church session to be considered for selection.

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A second interest bearing money account is designated for memorials and currently totals \$30,600. This account is for money given to the church in memory of someone, and the monies are used at the discretion of the church Session.

The church maintains 2 certificates of deposit (CD), a cemetery CD currently at \$24,800 and a reserve account currently at \$23,600.

Donations and tithing can be offered in the traditional collection plates or by mail, and the majority is still given in these ways. But Ebenezer also maintains a website in which there is an online store with Ebenezer-branded merchandise and an online donations page. The store and donations page are a new effort for EPC, and income data trends are not yet available.

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## **REFLECTING THE LOVE OF GOD . . .** **in our vision for moving forward.**

### **The 2020 PNC Questionnaire**

In July 2020, Ebenezer's PNC drafted and mailed a Survey Monkey questionnaire to 120 church members and friends. The purpose of this questionnaire was to gather critical input from these friends and members to assist in the drafting of this mission study. 46 completed surveys were returned for a 38% response rate. Cover letters were addressed to each individual in the household, and multiple questionnaires were included with adequate return postage. The cover letters emphasized the necessity of gathering the perspective of each individual.

45% of the respondents are male; 55% female.

50% of the respondents are 71+ years of age; 36% are 51 – 70; 10% are 31 – 50; .02% are 16 – 30, and .02% are 0 – 15 years of age.

60% are members of 21 years or more; 20% are members 11 – 20 years; 1% are from 3 – 10 years, and 1% are from 0 – 2 years.

We consider a 38% response rate to be strong, but we also find that the responses are overwhelmingly concentrated among the oldest and longest standing members of EPC. Because of this analysis, we sought additional resources to provide insights into the needs and perspective of 2 additional critical but absent groups necessary for a thriving congregation—youth and millennial families. Our determination of strengths, opportunities and hopes includes the survey data as well as the additional source information.

### **STRENGTHS**

A majority of the EPC questionnaire respondents feel that we place enough emphasis on “offering worship that provides a meaningful experience that helps members deepen their personal relationship with God”, “providing Christian education for adults,” “reflecting the love of God by engaging in acts of charity and service to the community,” and “providing a caring ministry to the sick, shut ins, and bereaved.” An overwhelming majority feel that EPC gives enough emphasis to “providing fellowship opportunities for members” and “supporting the global mission of the church denomination.”

The Open Commentary portion of the questionnaire asked respondents to share what they feel are Ebenezer's strengths, and some trends are evident. There is wide consensus that EPC “takes care of its own,” with respondents stating “Ebenezer is wonderful at ministering to its members, giving love and support – a family atmosphere,” “caring for each other, especially shut ins,” and “we genuinely care and

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pray for each other.” Many respondents refer to the family atmosphere—“It’s a great family feeling. The welcomes from all the members make for a good day and also a good start for the week.”

The open comments also reflect that EPC cares for the sick—“We do a great job of caring for our sick, elderly (shut ins), and the bereaved” and “long time members in the church continue to reach out to others that are sick/elderly and unable to attend services.”

Other comments refer to ample fellowship opportunities, dedicated officers, and dedicated choir members, and the music ministry is mentioned as a definite strength.

It is clear from both the multiple choice questions as well as the open commentary that EPC is a welcoming place of love, family, and care.

### **OPPORTUNITIES FOR GROWTH**

The PNC questionnaire also gave respondents the opportunity to express where they feel EPC gives too much or not enough emphasis on ministries and programs. The overwhelming majority feel that not enough emphasis is given to “providing Christian education for children and youth.”

There is no statistically significant trend in EPC placing “too much emphasis” in any program area.

In the Open Commentary section of the questionnaire, respondents continued to emphasize their perspective on the youth program needs at EPC. Specific comments include “our main weakness is the absence of all the children we once had. They are the life of our future congregation!” and “Try to have programs, events, etc. that appeal to young people with children and the children also,” and “Youth program (lack of youth). . . most people with children want church with active youth programs.”

Other trends of note include multiple comments pointing to the need for an increase in membership and more participation/attendance from current membership. A significant number of responses focus on the need for music program expansion, Bible studies for engagement and learning the Word, more outreach in the community and a focus on social justice issues.

EPC is located in an area bordering the Harnett/Johnston County line that is currently experiencing tremendous housing development. In the words of one questionnaire respondent, “maybe we need to brainstorm ways to reach out in our community in ways that would encourage attendance.”

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Because the majority of questionnaire responses are from older, longtime members of EPC, we determined that it was necessary to explore information for youth and young families from outside sources. We consulted the Lewis Center for Church Leadership of Wesley Theological Seminary's "50 Ways to Strengthen Ministry With Youth," and we discovered relevant growth areas for EPC.

For Ebenezer to strengthen its youth focus, we will need to honor the spirituality of youth by "appreciating that youth ministry is more than youth group." Ebenezer must develop a program that encourages youth to be involved in all aspects of church life. We must not guess at young people's needs; we must solicit their input.

Our program will need to equip parents to nurture their children's faith. Parental influence is the primary factor determining the religious commitment of youth, so EPC must serve as a resource for families, their concerns and child raising issues.

To grow an effective youth program, EPC must "Get Real With Christian Education for Youth." We must ask if our youth Sunday School curriculum is seriously addressing the questions kids are really asking, and we must integrate "service learning" into Christian education to teach discipleship.

Ebenezer's congregation can only be strengthened by youth presence, and this can be partly accomplished by "Making Worship Meaningful for Young Persons." To do this, we must give youth meaningful and visible roles as worship participants, and make youth worship experience based, connect all elements of worship to a central message that causes the worshiper to make a connection with God. Even older and longstanding members of EPC noted that sermons need to be spiritually stirring and engaging.



If EPC can "Create a Sense of Belonging for Youth", the mission of the church will only be strengthened. We can do this if we provide youth with a sense of belonging, build group cohesiveness, and be present for them. As we seek to help them become the hands and feet of Christ, we show them Christ's love and understanding for their worship and faith needs.

And to build a strong youth fellowship, we must focus on creating an inviting and engaging church for young and new families. One key to youth attending church is the parent; a key to parents coming to church is offering something for their children. Young families want a place to worship and grow their faith together.

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Moving forward, EPC must broaden its approach to the “form” church can take. The COVID-19 restrictions forced our church to think anew in terms of sermon and message delivery. Our Facebook Live and YouTube streaming has extended EPC’s reach beyond 2900 Ebenezer Church Road. Using technology willingly and efficiently, EPC must continue to explore ways to keep God’s message at the forefront of the family’s life not just on Sunday but everyday.

The young millennial family has a desire to be a part of something bigger than themselves and effect their world in a positive way. Our outreach goals can help with this; we must also realize that the young family wants to impact the community in which they live. In short, EPC must grow a community and not just a church by offering ways to love and experience one another as faith in action. Millennial families are looking for people they can live their life with, not just a group they meet with once a week for an hour.

## **HOPES FOR THE FUTURE IN PARTNERSHIP WITH OUR NEW PASTOR**

### **Growth**

We would love to see EPC grow in membership so that our ministries may become stronger and our outreach may be extended. In order to accomplish this, we need to seek growth in our spiritual maturity and increase our servant mentality.

Residential development is coming our way, and in order to attract new members to help us do God’s work in this community, we must create a worship environment that is diverse and inclusive. We strongly believe that a vibrant youth program, Christian education emphasis, an extended outreach program, and a pastor with new energy and vision are the keys to realizing this growth.

### **Youth and Families**

Creating a church environment that welcomes young families is especially important to the long term health of our congregation.

While we want to remain true to our founding principles and practices, we realize that we must also expand our view of how God’s Word can be spread. To realize growth with youth and young families, we must seek to take advantage of technology; we must inquire about and listen to the needs of youth and



young families in their faith journey; we must involve all age groups in leadership and worship roles. EPC has a 101-year history of listening to God and letting his Word guide us toward the needs of our community and world. That must continue in a new age.

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## Christian Education

Many questionnaire responses expressed a desire for a “deeper dive” into scriptural study. This is a first step in strengthening the Christian education energy at EPC. Growing the current ministries of Every Woman Encouraged, and the existing Sunday School program, seeking more community service opportunities, initiating “issues” discussion groups, inviting community speakers, encouraging Christian entertainment fellowship, among many other programs are vital to Ebenezer’s Christian education. We must recognize that learning God’s Word can come in more than just the traditional methods if we hope to strengthen our Christian education focus.

## Outreach

As evidenced by multiple questionnaire responses, Ebenezer has a strong tradition of visiting the sick and shut-in, and throughout its history, this former mission church has reached beyond its walls to care for the community. Moving forward, we must develop more ways for Ebenezer members and friends to consider how they can transform their own lives by serving and helping others and listening for God’s call. We must supplement current ministries with special programs or tools to encourage members’ reflection on how they will apply a “hands and feet of Christ” mindset to their lives. Mission and outreach are not simply an expensive journey to a foreign land. A mission mindset begins with one small act that considers and responds to the needs of another.

## Pastor Characteristics

We want and need a pastor who is willing to work alongside us and who is called by God to serve. The pastor should lead positively, delegating to others to bring their gifts to the surface—a spiritual guide and partner to the congregation to help the church realize God’s plan for its work.

Personal attributes should include integrity, honesty, genuineness, faithfulness, and compassion. This pastor must be open to God’s leading in order to impart God’s Word in a manner that calls the congregation to worship and serve. One of the main points mentioned in survey responses was the importance of having a pastor deliver sermons that inspire, so the spirit moves us to live out lives of faith. We need a pastor with a passion for discerning God’s vision for Ebenezer and working in new and even more effective ways at realizing it.

We need someone who will minister to the elderly and to the young. Our new pastor should have a caring personality, a loving heart, and the ability to show us how to further spread Ebenezer’s caring and loving spirit into the community and beyond.

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