

**CONFIDENTIAL REPORT**

**DOVER BAPTIST ASSOCIATION'S MISSION:**

***Mission Past --- How Dover Arrived Here***

***Mission Present --- Where Dover Is Now***

***Mission Future --- Who Will Dover Be in 2025***

**FRAMEWORKS FOR DOVER'S DISCOVERY AND DISCERNMENT**

**for Dover's Leaders, Churches, and Partners**

**Rose Mary Stewart and Bob Dale**

**Co-Intentional Interim Directors of Missions**

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report is **descriptive, not prescriptive**. Our key observations and alerts for Dover Baptist Association are:

- **Dover's churches are stronger together and are more viable when united.** To strengthen our cooperative bond even more, we must intentionally plan, expand, and share in Dover's missional experiences together. We will need cultivate unity together, not uniformity.
- **Dover has a strong foundation with ample resources upon which it has been built.** To create an even better future, this heritage must be combined with innovation and then cultivated. New growth from historic roots is our goal.
- **Our ministry region's population is growing steadily but slowly.** Our churches must get ready for growth, including outreach to diverse people groups, to multiple generations alive simultaneously, for inclusive leadership, and for pioneering ministry opportunities.
- **Denominations are declining at all levels, including associations.** Churches continue to redefine themselves amid religious and cultural challenges.
- **Dover's leadership is aging, both in our churches and in our Association.** Without vibrant younger leaders and volunteers, Dover's future is limited.
- Wise and decisive action is needed to prepare for Dover's future mission and ministries. **Time is of the essence. 2025 will arrive quickly.**
- **Dover's decisions are spiritual and congregational, not corporate or institutional.** It's time to identify our central calling and to focus on our participation in God's mission to bring His kingdom to earth.

- It is imperative that Dover (1) **empower and develop church leaders for twenty-first century challenges** and (2) **equip leaders to support their congregations' spiritual health, growth, and vitality**. These two foci are Dover's missional priorities.
- **It is important that Dover's organizational structures and budget resources be aligned with its missional priorities**. The structures need to be simplified and streamlined, and our budget's income streams need to be diversified with fees and grants.
- **This report provides four future scenarios so we can consider and explore our ministry possibilities. Dover's immediate challenge is to discern God's mission theologically and practically**. Beliefs shape behavior, and behavior shapes beliefs. Rather than "either-or," Dover's future will build on both beliefs and behavior.
- **Dover stands at a crossroads**. We live and minister in a different era with distinct challenges. A great heritage is not enough to sustain Dover's viability into the future. Of necessity, we will pour new wine into new wineskins. As we pray and discern Dover's future together, our refined calling will reshape what we do, how we do it, and with whom we do it. In this new ministry situation, **Dover will need to sharpen our mission, simplify our structure, identify our leaders and staff to move us forward into our emerging future, and demonstrate radical stewardship of our finances, talent, and time. Without these disciplines, Dover will die.**

## DISCERNING DIRECTIONS: From History to Horizons

Jesus spoke to us clearly in the Sermon on the Mount. We are to “seek God’s kingdom and righteousness first” and, with that anchor, other priorities sort themselves out accordingly (Matthew 6:33). The kingdom of God is always our North Star and guiding compass.

### Renewed Minds and God’s Futures

**We mortals see the past and present, but we don’t know and can’t predict the future.** Each of us is interested in the future, though. We’ll live every new day of our lives in our futures. Thankfully, God holds all of our futures in His hands and primes possibilities for us.

Gratefully, God welcomes our interest in the future. Scripture tells us how we can prepare and grow into our futures. **“Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God’s will is --- his good, pleasing and perfect will”** (Romans 12:2). To discern God’s will, our highest quest in the present and future, we need renewed and transformed lives, in stark contrast to worldly patterns. Renewed minds seek that which is pleasing to God.

### Why Explore Dover’s Futures?

Why take an in-depth look at Dover’s present and futures now? Why think new thoughts now?

- To see clearly where Dover is in this moment
- To evaluate Dover’s strengths and vulnerabilities
- To fire faith and imagination for tomorrow
- To hone a statement of core purpose for Dover
- To focus on primary callings
- To align Dover’s goals, organization, and resources
- To be clear about plans and actions
- To escape unproductive ruts and routines

- To prune unproductive branches and deadwood
- To empower and mobilize Dover's leaders
- To accelerate innovation
- To ignore distractions
- To adapt faster and more intelligently to challenges
- To involve all generations in ministries
- To explore new ministry partnerships and clusters
- To participate with God's mission of Kingdom advance in Dover's region and beyond

### Renewing Our Minds Together

Transforming minds and lives is the journey we're on as we look ahead at Dover's next steps in ministry. How can we look together at God's will for the future with new minds and awakened eyes? Let's ask ourselves three timely questions:

- **Why?**
  - Why has God called us to ministry in this moment of time?
  - Why are we blessed with this stewardship?
  
- **What if...?**
  - What if we created a testimony of faith to keep us theologically grounded?
  - What if we empowered our leaders for present and future challenges?
  - What if we equipped our churches to launch new ministries together?
  - What if we refocused our ministries to do fewer things better?
  - What if we provided new media channels to tell our churches' stories better?
  - What if we simplified our governance structures to match our ministry focus?
  - What if we reached across more generations and more diverse people groups for Dover's leaders?

- What if we created a coaching culture so all of our leaders have “thought partners” as they face their futures?
- What if we trained our leaders to discern and prepare for their futures?
- What if we upgraded our office building for better hosting services for our churches?
- **How?**
  - How can we move forward faithfully?
  - How can we discover God’s will together?

The quest for God’s futures for Dover begins during this interim period.

### Questions Explored in Intentional Interim Processes

In the dynamism of America’s late 20<sup>th</sup> century religious mix, congregational consultants at the Alban Institute and other consultants across the United States realized traditional interim ministries don’t fit all transition situations. In the search for better resources and approaches, they noticed a parallel in the medical profession. While family physicians traditionally dealt with general physical needs, new kinds of medical specialists emerged and focused on particular health challenges. Similarly, **intentional interims became the health specialists in the world of ministry transitions.**

What are some of the key health concerns intentional interims examine most carefully?

- Situations of **conflict or prolonged stress** --- when healing is necessary and trust needs to be restored.
- Situations of obvious **spiritual illness or misbehavior** --- when restoration is necessary and deeper soul searching over time is required.
- Situations in **final transition** --- when ministries are ending and legacies are being considered.

- Situations of **rescuing or overreach** --- when leaders morph into managers and proper balance between the two roles needs to be regained.
- Situations following **long tenures** --- when entrenched patterns or passivity need to be addressed and a fresh course carved out carefully.

Of these transitional situations, the issues lower on the list tend to apply more to Dover and its organizations.

In these special circumstances, what are the questions intentional interims help their faith groups answer?

- **From Our Healthier Heritage, “Who Are We?” Questions** → Root systems, DNA, and established track records are resources to build on, if positive. Or, if negative, they become issues to cope with and resolve as the organization moves forward. Focused mission, undergirded by a clear sense of identity, is essential.
- **From Our Theological Communities, “What Do We Believe and Practice?” Questions** → Our external partners from our larger faith family expand our ministry community and build on core theological compatibilities.
- **For Our Sharper Mission, “What Are We Called to Do?” Questions** → Calling and identity are stewardships to be clarified and followed with intentionality.
- **For Our Key Leaders, “Who Are Our Future Internal Partners?” Questions** → Trust, alignment, and consensus are precious relational achievements, and they call for clear mutual understandings.
- **For Tomorrow’s Opportunities, “Who Will Be Our Future External Partners?” Questions** → Community prayer, conversation, discernment, and planning points us toward God’s horizons together.

These questions will provide broad-brush guidance as we move ahead. Let's look at who Dover is now and who Dover could be in the future. Let's look for a **future from the past but not a future for the past. We have new opportunities ahead.**

## DOVER'S CULTURAL, RELIGIOUS, REGIONAL, AND ORGANIZATIONAL CONTEXTS

### How We Think Shapes What We Do

We live and minister amid the tensions and confusion between our modern and post-modern eras. Modern thinking relied on reason over faith and had a false sense of confidence in humanity's ability to bring about world peace. Then, after World War II, the Industrial Era ended, and the Information Age emerged. Post-modern thinking has less confidence in reason, has lots of layered questions, personalizes reality, acknowledges that humans have biases, and continues to search for truth. In these overlapping eras, churches and culture have collided.

**Churches and their cultures have always had uneasy and competitive relationships.** Cultural historians and futurists identify times when seismic shifts stealthily reverse our cultures from "comfortable" to "chaotic." They call these shifts "watershed years," and we know well the challenges these watersheds bring to church life.

In recent times, **1945, 1969, 1990, and 2008 are considered watersheds.** Around these years, accumulated change broke old patterns and introduced new possibilities. When "watershed years" occur, churches (and other institutions) and leaders struggle to find new wineskins for the new wine.

**Churches ride the cultural tide.** The 1945 watershed saw World War II end, the United Nations form, manufacturing expand, and suburbs mushroom across America. Churches were caught up in the optimism of the time. Baptists launched new churches from coast to coast and set a goal of reaching "A Million More in '54" for our Sunday Schools.

**Churches and culture divide.** With the 1969 watershed after three high-profile assassinations, Vietnam War protests, rights movements, and the Age of Aquarius, churches suddenly found themselves butting heads with culture. Blue laws ended, and Sunday shopping and sports activities expanded. Churches had new competition and were no longer the only game in town. Religious and secular politics arose in the Baptist world. Here in Virginia (and beyond), the Moral Majority drew dividing lines in the political (and religious) sands.

**Culture pushes back against churches.** Denominations had begun to lose momentum by the 1990 watershed. The Industrial Age morphed fully into the Information Age, and that was (and is) a tough corner for traditional institutions to turn. The internet and then social media created local communities and global networks instantly. Tensions grew as both modern and postmodern worldviews struggled to be heard.

The tensions overflowed into the traditional churches. Willow Creek and Saddleback tried to offer options. Churches for seekers and single generations emerged. Congregations changed worship formats, musical styles, and group study formats. Post-modern thinking confronted traditional approaches, and the Church's witness was tested. Debate and conflict were common.

**Culture forces identity discernment.** With the 2008 watershed, America was beginning to recover from recession, electing its first minority President, and engaging in several international struggles. With post-modern thinking dominating, churches were threatened with loss of identity and replacement. Churches began and continue to define themselves as countercultural contrast communities in diverse and various ways, reflecting God's kingdom more than any nation, group, or culture. New wine was being poured into new wineskins.

### Baptists in Context

In this changing world, we Baptists are a diverse lot. Globally, 211 groups currently belong to the Baptist World Alliance. In the United States, at least 60 Baptist groups have been identified. Here in Central Virginia, Baptist diversity is evident too. In our region, we have churches aligned with the Baptist General Association of Virginia, the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship (since 1991), the Southern Baptist Conservatives of Virginia (since 1993), National Baptists, Progressive Baptists, the Alliance of Baptists, and the American Baptist Convention, among others. **Dover ministers in a crowded and diverse Baptist context.**

Geographically, Baptists in America are most heavily concentrated in the East and South: the middle of Mississippi is the geographic center of Anglo-American Baptists in the United States, and Knoxville, Tennessee is the center

point for African-American Baptists. We are biblically, theologically, and historically grounded people. Congregationally, we practice self-governance. Practically, **we Baptists are independent but cooperative.**

But, **Baptists in the future won't necessarily mirror Baptists from the past.** Some historical and cultural perspective is important for understanding Dover's possible futures. We gaze forward over the horizon and then glance backward to discern what's next. Before looking ahead to where we want to go, some futurists suggest looking back to see how we got here. Why? DNA is a major shaper of our destiny. **Hindsight and foresight converge in insight.**

### Tradition Challenged by Non-Traditional Times

Traditional Baptists in the South have been "a three-book bunch." We read the Bible to keep God's kingdom central in our souls. We open our hymnals and sing our theology from our hearts. We rely on Robert's Rules of Order to guide our messy business meeting debates as we find our ways forward together.

But, **we're in a non-traditional and divided era. Our Baptist local denominational world is changing rapidly and confusingly, along with our larger national and international cultures. And, Dover Baptist Association is caught in the middle of the muddle. For Dover's leaders to step back, use a co-intentional interim process, look ahead strategically, and refocus now is timely.**

### Local Churches in the Baptist Mix

Historically, **Baptist denominations in our American South have resembled a 3-layer cake.**

- The **top layer, our national conventions**, incorporated all things Baptist across North America, with the globe on the horizon.
- The **middle layer, our state conventions**, kept a special focus on regional geography and ministries, while still mirroring the interests of the national level.

- The **bottom layer, our district associations, like Dover**, dealt with local ministry opportunities as they still supported the national and state structures.

Local churches have mostly watched the larger denominational parade pass by.

In this pattern, local churches have been the cake plate, holding up the entire denominational pastry. This traditional 3-tiered operational approach of Baptists in America has weighed down local churches with one heavy expectation: our local congregations will provide the funding and volunteer leaders for all three of the “layers” of denominational life above.

Some church leaders perceive denominational leaders have positioned themselves above the churches, operating more like managers and CEOs than ministers and missionaries. From that corporate-like stance, a pecking order has emerged. Churches who send more volunteer leaders and larger amounts of money to denominational missions get more attention than those who can’t or don’t. In this near-commercial mix, smaller or less generous churches can feel marginalized and unrepresented.

**Dover can ill afford to overlook any church of any size or circumstance. In Dover, no church or leader is lesser. We all have gifts to use in God’s kingdom.**

#### Denominational Pivots

In Virginia Baptist life, recent eras have seen significant pivots toward new ministry niches in and beyond the Commonwealth:

- In the 1980s, the Baptist General Association of Virginia pivoted in two new directions.
  - First, partnership missions matured. We began mission relationships based on what our partners needed rather than what we had to offer. In other words, we did missions projects “with” our partners rather than “to” them, a major change from a colonial mind set and one-size-fits-all missions. That change made Virginia’s mission partnerships more distinctive and our partners much happier. In one

rating, the BGAV was identified as the best Baptist group to work with among eight national mission sending agencies.

- Second, Virginia Baptists also focused on and expanded our disaster response ministries. When the tragedy of 9-11 happened in 2001, Virginia's feeding units were sent to New York City, because we could feed more people with more efficiency than other states.

These two moves put a new face on and a new flavor for missions and ministries among Virginia Baptists.

- In the 1990s, the Virginia Baptist family pivoted toward our churches with a "Church First" emphasis, reversing the traditional focus of denominational agencies that expected churches to face them. In Virginia, facing our churches meant we regionalized our work into the seven distinctive sub-cultures of the Old Dominion. We moved services and resources closer to our churches, creating "glocal" (combining global + local) missions.

Dover is part of Virginia Baptist's Central Region. In a few cases, regionalizing the BGAV staff triggered territorial competition with associations. In other associations, collaborative local-and-state partnerships were formed.

- In the new century, Virginia Baptists have pivoted toward the global world. At the state level, focus is on new church starts across the United States and calling traditional congregations to live out fresh expressions of ministry. That larger outreach has become an old-new expansion.
  - From our earliest days, the Virginia Baptist family has always had a few churches in surrounding states, mostly along our Commonwealth's borders and coast lines. But, with an "affinity" (non-geographic) approach to membership in the BGAV over the past twenty years, Virginia Baptists now have member churches in sixteen other states as well as internationally in Canada and South Korea. Balance is required to act globally and still attend to local needs. It's

easy to be enticed to reach far while neglecting some concerns nearer home.

- Locally, associational borders have become more porous as churches move back and forth to find their best partners for ministry. There's more talk about neighboring associations partnering or merging for additional impact in missions and ministries. **The denominational picture is becoming more fluid, and Dover's borders and outreach may grow as well.**
- In 2017, seventeen new churches were launched by the BGAV. Four of those new plants were outside Virginia. None were in Dover or Central Virginia. **Dover will need to stay alert for opportunities to start new churches, while always caring for our existing churches.**
- **Dover will have future pivots to consider too. However, we must not pivot from our basic beliefs and convictions. We will need to remain true to our theological foundations. With God's grace and help as our only qualifier for service, we will raise up new leaders, attempt new ministries, and stabilize our struggling churches. Every church member, every leader, and every congregation is important to Dover's future. We cannot neglect our smaller churches, our lesser known leaders, or our communities starving for witness of God's kingdom. We must be good stewards in reaching out to the world God has set before us.**

**In God's kingdom, as sisters and brothers in His family, we all are precious to Him.** Paul noted, there are no external distinctions in God's eyes: "There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male or female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus" (Gal. 3:28, cf. Col. 3:11). **We are all equally valued by God --- persons, churches, and associations. We must continue to rely on God's Spirit for discernment and leadership. With our enduring beliefs, we look toward future changes.**

## Unrest in the Baptist Family

With denominational dynamics morphing quickly and resources shrinking, **many churches are now examining their denominational relationships, including in Dover.**

- **Traditional Churches Are Grieving.** Some of our churches are disoriented by denominational erosion. They are experiencing the waning of long-time familiar programs and a loss of “family ties.” For these congregations, many traditional approaches and resources typical of Old Time Baptists in the South have been sadly lost or minimized.
- **Both-And Churches Are Exploring.** Some of our churches are feeling a new sense of freedom, defining themselves according to their own ministry callings and aligning with a variety of newer Baptist expressions of ministries and missions. For these Baptist congregations, it’s a time to breathe in some new options and to clarify their own identities, while still adopting a mix-and-match, as-needed approach to the use of denominational resources.
- **New Wineskins’ Churches Are Fermenting.** Some of our churches are steadily disconnecting from denominational connections altogether, are shedding traditional Baptist images and practices they see as limiting, and are functioning independently. In this era of change, these Baptist congregations are redefining themselves and exploring new ministry frontiers, usually with a generational preference and/or a less theologically dogmatic emphasis.
- **Customized Churches Are Emerging.** Some of our churches, seeing “Baptist” as a barrier to their preferred audiences, have removed all denominational labels from their names, and have customized their ministries to focus on de-churched or unchurched demographics. They operate without obvious denominational links, but are willing to accept benefits their unacknowledged denomination may provide.

**Dover has congregations in each of these categories.** In some of Dover's churches, there are members who are grieving, exploring, fermenting, and emerging --- being pulled in several directions as their faith moves them forward. **In this fast-changing atmosphere, churches and individual members often feel they have fewer and fewer friends in Baptist denominational structures.**

Associations, to succeed, will acknowledge and bridge diverse ministry styles and approaches across the Baptist family. **Dover can't afford to marginalize any of its churches. Neither can we allow ourselves to be marginalized by any of them in this continuing search for effective ministry.**

### Baptist Associations --- Squeezed in the Middle

Amid all of the Baptist ebb-and-flow, associations are caught in the middle. Top-tier denominational entities now provide less on-site assistance to local churches. Dover is now squeezed between the practical needs of our partner churches and the shrinking resources of denomination's first-and-second tiers.

But, **Dover has a clear advantage --- we have more direct and intimate connections with the leaders in our partner churches than other denominational entities.** When we note trends in Central Virginia, they're our trends. When we look at futures, they're our futures. When we explore emerging ministries, they're our ministries. When we plan neighborly outreach, they are our neighbors. **Ministry is local first. Remember: we are geographically nearer our congregations and future ministries than any other Baptist resource.**

Also, to our advantage, Dover Baptist Association has a valued history and legacy. We are one of the oldest Baptist associations in America. Our root system is older than our national and state denominational organizations. Dover (1783) was born alongside the United States. In fact, some of Dover's oldest congregations, like Goochland (1771) and Dover Church (1773), predate the nation's founding and the launch of the first Baptist mission group in America, the Triennial Convention (1814). Dover had already been serving God's kingdom for nearly a half-century when Virginia Baptists organized (1823) and for almost two-thirds of a century at the launch of Baptists in the South (1845). **With 235 years**

**of ministry experience and with a pattern of long-term associational leaders, Dover has gained hard-won wisdom and a good reputation.**

At Dover's founding, our boundaries were mostly physical, defined by our rivers, bays, and mountains. Dover encompassed a rough triangle north of the James River and east of a line running between Goochland and Stafford Counties to the Chesapeake Bay and Peninsula area. With our current local outreach to an 80 mile by 40 mile area (almost the size of Connecticut) and beyond, let's review our heritage, stretch our faith, and then imagine future possibilities.

### Who Dover Has Been Is Part of Who Dover Is Becoming

Dover "knows a thing or two because it's seen a thing or two" since 1783. **We were anchors in the early development of the nation and denomination.** Our part of Virginia, especially Goochland and Orange Counties, gave birth to the religious freedoms guaranteed in the First Amendment and Bill of Rights. It's no accident, with Virginia's early missions' outreach to Liberia and larger Africa in the 1800s and the legacy of Virginia's Lottie Moon, Baptists' International Mission Board is located in Richmond. In the early twentieth century, a then Dover church, Pine Street near VCU, was the largest church in the Southern Baptist Convention. In 1940, Dover was the largest association in Virginia and the sixth largest in America.

As noted, Dover Association covered a much more extended geographic area in its early days than it does now. We served as "mother" to several other associations, including Hermon (1903), Peninsula (1904), and Richmond (1950). Our early cooperative efforts focused on aggressively starting new churches and strengthening old ones.

For more than a century and a half, Dover was led entirely by volunteers, mostly strong pastors and lay leaders from the extended region. **In 1955, Dover employed W.E. Cullers, its first full-time coordinator of missions and ministries. W. Paul Hepler (1962-1976) and Richard T. Moore (1977-1995) next led Dover. Our current leadership search was triggered by the retirement of Steve Allbrook, only Dover's fourth employed missions' director in 235 years.**

In the early days, associations operated from homes or other spaces. For a couple of decades, Dover shared office space with Richmond Association and Middle District Association on Moss Side Avenue. Then, in 1983, Dover's 200<sup>th</sup> anniversary year, the Association's office moved to Brook Road/US1 and New York Avenue, just south of I-295. Finally, Dover moved to its current office building on Lakeridge Parkway in 2002.

**With its ministry legacy, its organizational health, and its financial viability, Dover has resources to pause in 2017-2018, move through an intentional interim process, and look ahead with discernment. Together, we can cultivate our deep roots and find our best route into the future.**

### Patterns and Perils

It's common for Baptist denominational structures and churches to fall into predictable organizational patterns. Denominations born out of the Reformation, like Baptists, Presbyterians, Lutherans, and Methodists, tend to be highly organized and tightly structured. Products of the Industrial Revolution, we have seen churches as machines. **Although the mechanical era has passed by, some denominations, associations, and churches still persist in trying to function like "well-oiled machines." Now, in an Information/Experience Age, it's our opportunity to serve as God's living, growing, organic communities of faith.**

In our era, the roles and titles for associational leaders have changed too. After World War II, "associational missionaries" mostly led local efforts to start new churches, do direct evangelism, and rally youth to Christian living. As the 20<sup>th</sup> century ended, the most common title was "director of missions" with more administration added to the earlier responsibilities. Now, especially as associations have added staff and complexity, "executive director of missions" has emerged as a fairly common title (as a congregation's key leader has been given the "senior pastor" title). **More creative titles are beginning to emerge.**

Still, associational leaders are more apt to be cast as mechanics than gardeners, as administrators more than missionaries, reflecting an older and ebbing cultural model. Overall, associational ministry has edged slowly toward ad-ministry. While good administration is important for associational leaders,

effective management flows out of our clear calling to missions and ministry. **“Why” is first, and “how” follows.**

Traditionally, most associational leaders have been older white men, working singly. Is it time to step back and evaluate leader types and titles? Let’s look for trailblazers, scouts, mentors, and partners to lead Dover. **How long can we thrive (or even survive) without a major re-focus on future roles and opportunities?**

### When Associations Mimic Conventions

As the bottom layer and most squeezed tier of the denominational cake, where do these denominational changes leave Dover and our fellow associations?

**When district associations try to be and do everything national and state conventions are and do, they often over-organize ourselves and end up with organizational units with little or nothing to do.** In recent Executive Committee meetings, of Dover’s roughly 30 committees and governing groups, just over 20% of our committees provided progress reports or brought motions for actions. Many committees were absent. If a long-standing pattern, Dover will need to examine organizational structure, streamline, and update our Constitution and By-Laws as well as our Operations Manual to match our purpose and structures. **Healthy organizations flow naturally from and support their core callings.**

Additionally, the average age of attendees at recent Executive Committee meetings was in the 60-70 year range. Very few participants were mid-life or younger. Many of our churches reflect an older age cohort as well. If this age profile is typical of Dover at large, **we have a very short time to involve younger adults or risk facing a leadership drought.**

Moreover, as a practical matter, **associations struggle with the crunch of being a “third-level loyalty,”** coming after believers’ commitments to their families and their local churches. Associations, as volunteer organizations, typically have to settle for secondary service energies, especially from younger generations. Being third creates challenges to be faced and leaves gaps to be filled.

Interestingly, at every level of denominational work, fewer and fewer traditional congregational programs, such as discipleship and mission's programs, are being resourced. Consequently, smaller churches and key leader groups no longer have easily accessible assistance. This trend calls for Dover to focus carefully on what is needed, but lacking, and to choose priorities with discernment. **We will want to relate to and empower the leaders and equip the churches in our region as our primary priorities and responsibilities.**

### Dover's Geographic Setting

**Dover's "draw area" is growing.** Located in Central Virginia, Dover's churches are native to the Old Dominion's Tidewater and Piedmont regions. Dover's in a "stretch" location. On the "fall line" of the James River, Richmond and Dover look toward our bay to the east and toward our mountains to the west, each with different cultures and outlooks. Our churches "face" multiple cultures as well.

**Historic Richmond, the seat of state government, and a hub for business, medical care, education, and transportation, anchors our larger region. In recent years, Richmond has gained "new-economy" businesses in technology, creative services, life sciences, big data, and digital media industries. Those gains have encouraged regional growth and set a positive tone for Dover's churches in the city of Richmond.**

In general, the counties south of Richmond are not growing or shrinking, while Richmond's outer neighborhoods and the counties west, north, and east of Richmond continue to expand. **While culturally traditional, much of Dover's territory is poised for new residential expansion and business growth.** In 2017, the core of the larger Richmond metro area --- Hanover, Henrico, and Chesterfield counties --- saw home sales grow by 9%. Also in 2017, Richmond, Hanover, Henrico, and Chesterfield grew to a total of one million citizens for the first time in history.

Additionally, Goochland County grew 5% in population over the last decade and added 105 businesses (from 539 to 644) between 2005 and 2015. (Interestingly, deaths still outnumber births in the county, showing that the new

“come-here” residents are mostly beyond their childbearing years.) Goochland is watching the growth from Short Pump’s shopping area and West Creek’s business park edge westward.

Along with Short Pump’s growth, the Glen Allen area continues to expand as well. Hanover County’s growth continues steadily, but no longer at the phenomenal 30% per decade that’s been its growth rate in recent decades. Hanover will top 110,000 residents this decade. New Kent County, while still uncongested, is currently one of the fastest growing municipalities in Virginia. Between two expanding metropolitan areas along I-64, New Kent is becoming a warehousing and shipping center.

Steady suburban and exurban growth is expected to continue as Richmond’s urban core continues to fill. Situated around Richmond’s western, northern, and eastern edges with accessible roads and interstate corridors, **Dover’s expanding region attracts families who want the jobs the larger region provides, but who also want the open spaces, easy atmospheres, and good schools the counties generally feature.**

Hopefully, these new arrivals also want good churches. **Dover’s churches are situated to bridge sub-regions and sub-cultures with the Gospel, if we are willing to bridge our “from here - come here” differences and to reach out in faith, with imagination, and with energy.**

#### Baptist Associations Are Distinctive Organizations

**Associations are volunteer organizations, the most difficult type of structures to lead. Purpose and participants drive Dover’s ministry community.** Purpose --- singular. Participants --- plural. Future leaders of faith-based volunteer organizations will cultivate a knack for putting participant’s dreams into words and actions.

Leading from purpose that engages participants is a delicate balancing act. If purpose is unclear, volunteer participants lose interest and stop stepping forward. If participants stop volunteering, the purpose dies. Experiencing God’s kingdom motivates commitment for deeper service.

**Future associational leaders, as leaders of leaders, will grow themselves in order to grow others. This action is basic in our present and necessary for our futures.**

- With associational staff, they will develop confident ministers who are free and able to act.
- With key associational leaders, they will empower “now” leaders, coach “new” leaders, and develop “next” leaders --- in order to span emerging leadership challenges.
- With congregational leaders, they will cultivate leaders for congregational centers and edges, along with leaders to bridge between centers and edges.

Associational leaders will serve as models and mentors.

**We co-labor side-by-side in ministry.** We aren’t an “above-below” business or a vertical hierarchy organization. Our public meetings should feature conversations about dreams and visions before decisions and votes. It takes maturity, wisdom, and finesse to lead an association toward its purpose with its participants. **When partners in ministry un-volunteer, associations and churches wither. Mission and morale, in balance, are our operational foundations.**

#### Dover’s Questions for 2025

We’ve thoroughly described our ministry contexts in time, place, and dynamics to identify where Dover is at present. Now, **let’s look toward 2025.**

**What potential challenges will face Dover then?**

**We know 2025 will be different than 2018. We just don’t know the details.** For instance, what if in seven years we’re dealing with such diverse drivers of change as how...

...artificial intelligence revolutionizes the ways information is shared and decisions are made in churches,

...church budgets would be impacted by the loss of tax deductions for contributions,

...a youth movement with new interests challenge settled approaches,  
... a religious revival bridges ethnicities and religious groups,  
...another terrorist attack impacts our region,  
...denominations continue to have less importance to younger generations  
and to those who have married across religious groupings or world religions,  
...new laws limit religious freedom and 501c3 nonprofit organizations,  
...rapid transit brings new housing developments and business to our  
church fields, and/or  
... a more secular society is less hospitable to churches.

And, we can imagine many other drivers of major changes. It's clear that our future ministry context will challenge leaders and churches.

Amid all of the mixed bag of changes that may and will emerge, it's time to wrestle with and discern Dover's key redemptive opportunities. Ready?

- **IN 2025, HOW WILL DOVER BE DIFFERENT AS A SERVANT OF GOD'S KINGDOM?**
  - How will Dover rely on God's Spirit to shape surprising futures?
  - What's absolutely critical to Dover's future mission?
  - Who are the emerging leaders God will call for Dover's future?
  
- **IN 2025, WHAT WILL DOVER DO DIFFERENTLY IN SERVICE TO THE KINGDOM OF GOD?"**
  - What ministry development (R&D) will underpin Dover's future?
  - What ministry resources will Dover invest in its future?

**WILL DOVER GROW AND THRIVE? OR, WILL DOVER WITHER AND DIE?  
WHAT FUTURE IS GOD CALLING US TO CLAIM?**

## **DOVER'S MINISTRY POSSIBILITIES: Discerning Future Horizons**

**Your co-intentional interims have dug deep into varied resources to identify Dover's potential ministry options.** We've listened to an array of Dover's leaders, reviewed Dover's history and ministry patterns, visited churches, looked carefully at Dover's governing and guiding documents, observed and taken part in numerous gatherings, asked "what if?" many times, consulted professional futurists and regional planners, interviewed those who are savvy about the future of American religion, and have tried diligently to listen to God's Spirit for guidance.

We've tried to take seriously the wisdom of Danish futurist Rolf Jensen who observes **we're in an Experience Age now where the hungers of the heart are paramount.** In our era, according to Jensen, emotions and storytelling energize people more than information and statistics.

Jensen claims **six hungers motivate our best futures now:** adventure, togetherness, care, personalization, peace of mind, and convictions. What if Dover incorporated and combined these six hungers into one vision of missions and ministries? **Imagine Dover as a community of closely-knit faith fellowships on innovative mission together with God from a sense of common calling.** What a moment for faith and ministry to step up and serve!

From these inspirations, we've crafted four possible ministry scenarios. **Watch for "S.T.E.E.P." themes** throughout the scenarios below:

**S → social**

**T → technology**

**E → economics**

**E → environment**

**P → politics**

"S.T.E.E.P." themes are common in future scenarios. **Since we're exploring a Baptist association, we've added "E.R." for education and religion/theology to the mix for "S.T.E.E.P.E.R." exploration.**

## Dover's Next Ministry Options? Four Scenarios

Ministry scenarios are **stories of what's emerging next for us**. These future narratives help us find our best ministries and follow our clearest callings. Ministry scenarios shine light on our possibilities, pointing to wiser choices.

Think of Jesus' parables. Powerful, open-ended stories, they call for answers to "what should I/we do now?" questions. Jesus welcomed hearers inside his stories. More than simply hearing and nodding, they were beckoned to reflect, discern, and act. These parables invite listeners' actions and applications.

Have you heard of parabolas? They are the U-shaped reflectors around bulbs in headlights or flashlights. The shape of those parabolic reflectors sends light forward with focus. From the same root word, both parables and parabolas focus illumination on what's ahead.

**Like Jesus' parables, scenarios shine light on the worlds into which we're moving. They give us eyes to envision and imagine possible futures.**

**But, don't expect Dover's most favorable ministry scenarios' to be automatically obvious to us. Expect to be challenged and have to wrestle with and weigh options. Let our discernment processes, singly and collectively, begin now. Scenarios don't lead to snap judgments.** To paraphrase Paul Harvey, we will have to tell "the rest of the story" ourselves together.

### Reading in the Future Tense

For this report, Rose Mary and Bob have assumed the role of "**future historians.**" We tried to step **beyond today's "blur" to look back at Dover from 2025.** As you read the future stories below, here are some guidelines for seeing where Dover may be seven years from now. **This timeframe may seem short, but Dover is at a turning point that makes every year precious.**

- Mile Marker 1 --- **Imagine 2025.** In 2025, who and what will Dover be? **What will we be doing differently seven years from now?**

- Mile Marker 2 --- **Pray for Dover's future.** Prepare intentionally. **Get quiet before you plunge into these future stories. Ponder these four scenarios reflectively.** Ask God to sharpen your intuitions. Listen to your heart. Be open to and discerning about God's leading.
- Mile Marker 3 --- **Read these four scenarios all the way through twice.** **The first time, read them fairly quickly and get comfortable with the format. The second time, read them more meditatively, perhaps aloud. Let them soak in fully and sink in deeply.**
- Mile Marker 4 --- **These four scenarios are stories with faces, reflecting faith's future witness.** Step back from them, and look at them objectively from the outside. Step into them, and experience them from the inside.
- Mile Marker 5 --- **Look at these four scenarios from a STEEPER perspective.** **In 2025, which of the influencing elements will have impacted Dover the most?** How have they changed Dover and its ministry context?
- Mile Marker 6 --- **How was faith put into action in these scenarios? What risks made the most difference?** What did the saints do differently, and how did they experience faith breakthroughs?
- Mile Marker 7 --- **Remember the ultimate measure of these ministry narratives --- the kingdom of God.** Explore **two kingdom questions:**
  - **How was God's kingdom served in each scenario?**
  - **Where was God's kingdom blocked or missed?**

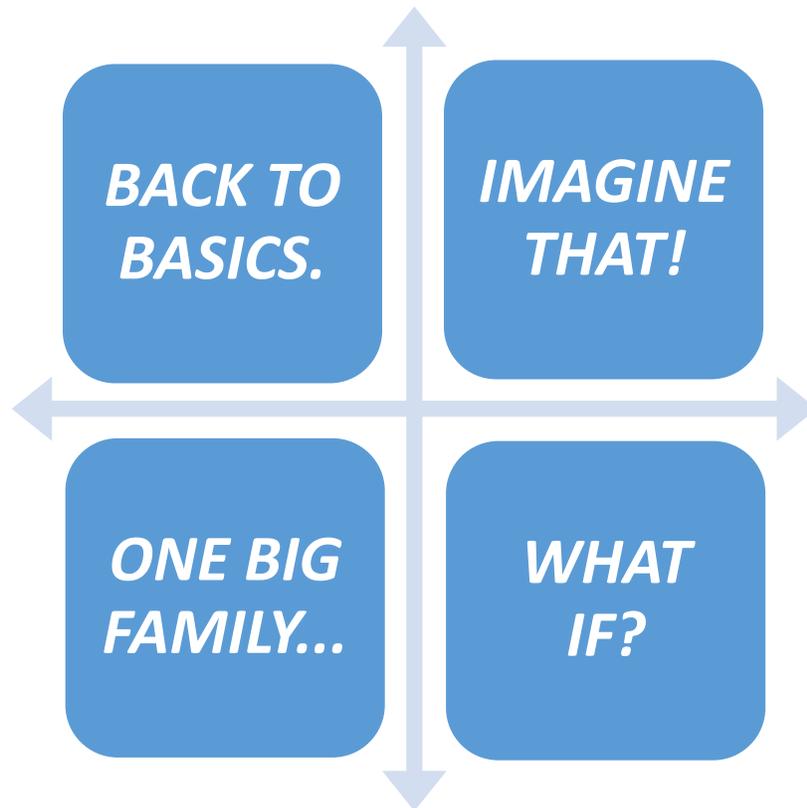
## Four Future Ministry Stories for Dover's Discernment

### MINISTRY SCENARIOS FOR DOVER'S DISCERNMENT

Horizontal Axis → LOW (left) & HIGH (right) UNCERTAINTIES

Vertical Axis → LOW (top) & HIGH (bottom) IMPACTS

The four scenarios below experience ministry from (1) low to (2) high **uncertainties** on the horizontal axis of risks. They also frame ministry from (1) low to (2) high **impacts** on the vertical axis of rewards.



To discern Dover's future, where are we in these four ministry scenarios?  
Read, imagine, and discern.

- **BACK TO BASICS: Low Uncertainty, Low Impact**

In the midst of these turbulent times, Dover's churches get back to basics. We look back on our good history and then focus on living our simple faith traditions in today's imperfect world. Surrounded by immorality, we model faith's foundational wholesomeness and values. It's our choice and our witness. Looking for Eden, this is our chance to get life and faith right.

We hunger for revival and renewal. As persons rooted in salvation and Scripture, we believe God will empower us to begin again, restore goodness, and demonstrate purity. For us, God and family are our first and most pristine priorities.

Our churches, styled like local mom-and-pop stores, are happy places where complainers are marginalized. We like predictability, certainty, and responsibility. We trust our programs, our leaders, and our fellow believers to turn defeats into successes. Rescue from a fallen world and the harmony of paradise are goals we pursue.

- **Missing Generations' Church** longs for its younger former members who leave for college and jobs, never to return to "home." It now spotlights all of the babies and children it can attract, even though most of the members say "We've taken our turn" babysitting and teaching children.

When Missing Generations calls Pastor Young to lead them, they begin to evaluate their ministries. Looking at its membership generationally, the leader team clarifies the church's situation. They have a few Old Guard members in their 80's and 90's, part of the Builder (or Greatest) generation

born before 1945. While less involved in the church's life than in earlier days, these elders are still invested and revered, and they continue to give sacrificially to church needs. However, with every death of an elder, the church's budget shrinks.

Baby Boomers, born between 1946 and 1964, form the core of the church. They want their children and grandchildren inside Missing Generations, or, at least, they want members the ages of their scattered families. Gen X (Latch Key Kids, born 1965-1976), Millennials (Gen Y, born 1977-1995), and Centennials (Gen Z, born since 1996) are barely represented in the church. Financial support is an ongoing challenge for Missing Generations. Their Old Guard tithes incomes, Baby Boomers give to missions, and the few younger generational members often support causes. Missing Generations' budget suffers.

In a beginning effort to reach younger adults with children, the church develops a daycare program. The daycare ministry brings younger families from the surrounding neighborhoods to the church building each weekday. Since studies show people tend to belong to churches they pass on their way to work, a few younger families visit Sunday services. Missing Generations is relieved, after some debate, that its building is used between Sunday mornings and Wednesday nights.

- **Link Church**, just down the road from Missing Generations, sees her neighboring church's success with daycare and decides to go one step farther and bridge generations. Link Church, realizing that for the first time in human history we have six generations alive simultaneously, sees a new ministry opportunity. Link provides daycare for both children and seniors.

Their daytime programs bring the two different age groups in their care together two afternoons a week to create instant

grandparents and grandchildren. For a couple of hours, time stands still, and playing together is the only agenda. The gap in family circles created by mobility in our society is bridged temporarily for those daycare participants whose families are often scattered and sometimes shattered.

This ministry is easy for Link Church. With ramps and a drop-off circle already in place, this ministry is natural and more than pays for the extra caregivers who have been hired.

- **Terminal Church** is in trouble. Terminal is dated --- in two ways. One of Dover's longest-tenured congregations, its thought processes reflect earlier days, and its membership's average age is 67.

The aging church hired a consultant to help them envision their future. Then, the consultant was stunned when the congregation rejected its own long-range plan. Sadly, the membership realized too late they had missed their chance to stay vital.

Why? Twenty years earlier, they had divided over whether or not to begin a new church. Terminal chose not to start the new church and, consequently, it lost many of its best leaders who felt called to launch a new mission. Terminal lost momentum. Now, they had also lost hope and were watching each other die one-by-one. In a few short years, all of them would be gone.

- **Reach Church** sees a local mission field in its struggling nearby congregations. A sturdy church with a heart for others, Reach creates a "three-church ministry cluster" with Solid Church and Fragile Church. Reach is a growing church, Solid is a stable church, and Fragile is on the brink of closing.

Reach and Solid “adopt” Fragile as an extension ministry, sending members to strengthen Bible study and basic discipleship programs and to re-establish Vacation Bible School. Reach and its cluster partners see this recovery work as basic local missions in action. Other clusters develop in Dover to do a variety of stabilizing and strengthening ministries.

- **Dover Association**, as a community of churches, continues and expands its mission work with our Tipi Wakan Partnership, our outreach to Sioux peoples in the Dakotas. Dover’s six Native American congregations, with Samaria (1902) as the oldest of the group, help lead the way. Hope becomes a major theme of ministry to a setting with one of the highest suicide rates in the United States.
- **Smoke Rise Church** becomes a new one of Dover’s merged congregations, rising from an unusual beginning. Knollwood Church’s building burns to the ground in the early hours of a Monday. Nothing is salvaged. The congregation, already struggling, is devastated. Neighboring Lakeside Church invites Knollwood to share the Lakeside building while the burned out facility is rebuilt. Meeting times for Sunday School and worship services are flip-flopped so each congregation can maintain its identity and routine while sharing the same space. Wednesday night fellowship dinners and prayer meetings, however, are held together.

Problems crop up with Knollwood’s insurance settlement. Delays means the church can’t begin to rebuild, and time drags on. An idea emerges. Why shouldn’t the two churches merge? They share the same “draw area.” Many of the members have known each other for years, and sharing the same building has introduced new relationships. Their pastors are already friends. Merger talks move along quickly and

smoothly. Soon, Knollwood and Lakeside reconstitute as Smoke Rise Church, reflecting the fire in their history as well as Pentecost's flame.

Knollwood sells its property and divides the proceeds between Smoke Rise and Dover. Smoke Rise now has an emergency fund. Dover now has money to plant new churches. The two traditional churches, now one, look at their new resources of people and money and feel secure now.

### **In 2025, what basic kingdom ministries are evident in Dover?**

- **ONE BIG FAMILY... : Low Uncertainty, High Impact**

Like a big family, Dover's churches believe and practice caring, connecting, and nurturing. We love others in God's name, as Scripture directs. The Great Commandment tells us to love God with our whole being and to love our neighbor like we love ourselves (Matthew 22:35-40; Mark 12: 28-34). The command to be neighborly moves us to be compassionate, generous, and helpful to "the least of these" (Matthew 25:31-46). Jesus noted that loving our neighbors brings us near God's kingdom (Mark 12:34).

Our motivation? We love our neighbors, because God loved us and them first. The caregiving of Dover's churches moves in concentric circles, beginning with family and friends, then encouraging self-care, and ultimately motivating us to be concerned for our larger world (Acts 1:8). As directed, we protect the poor and helpless, visit the prisoner, reach out to the sick, and welcome the marginalized and the stranger (Luke 4:16-30).

- **Neighbor Church** feels called to "be with" and "do for." It's a "neighbor" in many constructive ways. It provides clothes closets and holiday food baskets. It hosts workdays for local

neighborhood needs. It builds ramps for the handicapped and helps the elderly winterize their homes. It cuts wood to provide heat for poverty-stricken households. It sponsors community youth sports to care for kids and to meet their neighbors. It prayer-walks its neighborhood to meet people and to discover unattended needs.

Deliberately reaching out to others, Neighbor Church's members, with leadership from its WMU, show their hearts by creating clusters of concern and care. Members volunteer in Neighbor's outreach to shut-ins and for community ministries. They deliver Meals-on-Wheels, build with Habitat for Humanity, minister to formerly marrieds, and volunteer at the Ronald McDonald House so the families of hospitalized children have shelter and solace.

Responding with faith consistent with what they've been taught at Neighbor, members put their time and money where their mission is. Neighbor is known as "the church with the big heart."

- **Community Church's** members discover a unique ministry. They volunteer in concession stands during high school sports events so parents who usually staff those concession stands can now enjoy watching their own children take part in the teams, bands, and pep squads. The concession stands become connection sites to build new relationships and bring new families to Community. The church has learned that if you go to people where they are, they're more apt to join you where you are. Community Church is admired for its neighborliness and sensitive community involvement.
- **Care Communities.** With home health and personal care aide jobs expected to expand by 41% by 2026, three of Dover churches meet this growing need and independently launch new parish nurse ministries with free blood pressure checks,

daily medical check-up calls to homes of members and non-members, and regular foot care clinics. These churches report that “foot washing” in preparation for nail care creates an atmosphere for pastoral care when very personal hopes and very deep concerns are shared heart-to-heart.

- **Harvest Church** begins God’s Garden, a community vegetable garden. Harvest tithes 10% of its crop yield to a nearby elder care home, creating a farm-to-table relationship that expands its already existing outreach to the facility’s residents. Non-member neighbors join in the adventure of gardening, appreciating both the produce and the opportunity to help local retirees. Harvest welcomes these neighbors into the garden and the church.
- **Family Church** focuses on spiritual and physical wellness. Anchored in a strong discipleship ministry, Family draws large intergenerational groups from the community and from its membership into its weekly exercise groups. In the exercise gatherings, the stewardship of health opens body-and-soul conversations that flow across the church’s membership and out into the larger community. For those in Family’s exercise classes, self-care becomes a bridge to reach and to care for others.
- **Dover Association**, a caring family of faith, continues to expand its experience-based ministries in its public gatherings, like Operation Inasmuch and our “shoe box” ministries. We encourage our churches to continue working with local groups. We reach out in basic ways to our neighbors, Baptists and beyond, providing food, clothing, and shelter, with the intent of always strengthening spiritual foundations in those whose lives we touch.

- Neighborliness draws Dover's churches into supportive cooperatives, as two examples illustrate.
  - **Field of Dreams Clusters** describe several groupings of three churches each, joining forces and working together on special short-term projects and shared community ministries. These combined efforts multiply impacts, deepen discipleship, and keep kingdom dreams alive and growing.
  - **Ministry Partners** features two-by-two partnerships of nearby congregations who share a pastor, similar to the old circuit rider approach to ministry. Every fifth Sunday, they come together for worship and a fellowship meal. They report these gatherings remind them that, even though they are small churches, God's kingdom is big. Ministry Partners rejoice that they are part of a bigger redemptive enterprise.

**In 2025, what kingdom witness will Dover demonstrate through its extended family?**

- **IMAGINE THAT! : High Uncertainty, Low Impact**

Faith and imagination move our churches away from business as usual and invite us to anticipate what God's preparing us to do. We step out of our boxed-in lives. We improvise, create, innovate, invent, express, experiment, and become entrepreneurial ministers. We design new and needed initiatives. Old approaches no longer apply to our world.

In God's hands, "what if" is transformed into "what is." Like Paul on the Damascus Road, horizons unfold ahead of us, and options we never imagined become realities. The "new" calls us forward. It's time to stretch our ministries and missions. In a do-it-yourself era, we ask God to re-create us and to give us discerning eyes and willing hearts.

We find new and needed ministries aren't created once. We create them over and over again as we try to anticipate the future and ready ourselves for God's new calls. We become co-creators with God. In a dizzying world, we try to stay ahead more than catch up. We "imagine that" together.

- **Near Church** adopts the high school next door. The original relationship begins as a request from the school to provide an emergency "safe house" in the event of a fire or mass shooting. But, the partnership grows. Now, members tutor students and volunteer in the school in a variety of roles. More recently, Near Church adopts a local college and provides "second-chance" families for students who are far away from their own families or who are facing difficult life transitions. Near Church's pastor is named Virginia's School Volunteer of the Year.
- **Home Church**, near the local medical center, begins a "host family" ministry for patients and their families who come to town for brief medical visits. Empty nest families open their homes to patients who need places to rest and recover after a day of procedures and treatments. Some retirees in Home become volunteers at the medical center, finding meaning in helping people in distress find a friend. As a result, Home Church's reputation for hospitality grows, and its visibility in the region increases.
- **Old First Church** lives up to its name and acts first. It creates a community non-profit to provide ten co-working spaces in the

upstairs of its unused former parsonage in its downtown business area. Accessed by a secondary front entrance to their original pastor's study, this comfortable space quickly fills with workers --- freelancers, entrepreneurs and start-up workers, and those who work virtually from a distance. These workers are looking for a receptionist-host to welcome them and others, a coffee shop for conversations, and access to business machines. A conference room adds an aura of "officialdom" for them and their visitors. The reasonable rents more than offset First Church's costs and taxes.

The primary entrance to the former parsonage leads to a first floor coffee shop with salads and wraps, adding both traffic and revenue. Informal "Bagels and Bibles" conversations in the basement lounge below the coffee shop at noonday and 5:30PM each day have been a hit with both the co-workers and the coffee customers. These "munch and muse" conversations provide settings to explore faith with others who share a busy world.

First Church discovers this co-working niche, a market that's doubling in size every 4-5 years, is a new and natural outreach for them. The church expands its off-site ministry to young adults and creatives. First's Minister to Young Adults moves his office into the space, hosts the daily Bible study conversations, and reaches out to those who are exploring a faith-based lifestyle.

- **Dover's Housing Cluster.** In one of its older neighborhoods, Dover's churches partner with Project: HOMES, a Richmond-area non-profit builder and renovator of homes, to rehab homes and renew the neighborhood between two of Dover's older churches. Together, the partners begin to rehab the most run-down homes.

Continuing to build and renovate home after home, the atmosphere and outlook of the neighborhood turns around. The awakening of neighborhoods becomes contagious when contractors build energy-efficient homes and churches grow spiritually-sensitive communities. Dover's churches find new community spirit, and unity brings new optimism and growth to their memberships.

- **"1 Day Seminary"** is inaugurated by Dover. Continuing education is essential for leaders who serve their congregations effectively. On a single Saturday, Dover leaders, both clergy and laity, get eight hours of high-quality training from the best teachers and trainers. For three hours in the morning, leaders learn more about "growing disciples." After lunch, leaders enjoy four hours of instruction on "interpreting the Bible." Following dinner, leaders learn about "caring for the flock."

Three different topics are offered twice each year, and Dover's leaders stay updated in the latest ministry ideas and resources. Dover's church leaders continue to grow inside out for God's futures.

- For our churches dealing with special equipping needs or facing congregational thresholds, Dover creates two sorts of **Training Teams**:
  - **Mentors-on-Call** provides ministry development, program assistance, and training updates for
    - New church starts
    - Sunday School and study groups
    - Discipleship, spiritual formation, and Christian growth initiatives
    - Evangelism and outreach efforts
    - Community ministry or missions projects

- Ministries of family health across generations
  - Leader development for congregational organizations and work groups
  - Visioning and planning groups
  - Budget and personnel committees
  - Pastor search teams
- **Urgent-Care-Network** provides special guidance for churches moving back from margins into mainstreams
    - Struggling or declining congregations
    - Churches facing conflict and/or working toward reconciliation
    - Merging and partnering churches
    - Congregations clustering to increase ministry impact

These training, consulting, and coaching resources bring new health to all of Dover's churches.

**In 2025, what imaginative kingdom ministries will Dover practice?**

- **WHAT IF? : High Uncertainty, High Impact**

Dover churches are kingdom partners in finding and building a better world. We're on a journey of discovery together. We're restless, looking for our futures, and ready to move ahead in a newer, freer world. We're eager to blaze new trails. It's time to minister on society's margins where the rewards are greatest and risks most significant. It's vital that we evangelize the hard-to-reach people around us.

We want congregations tailored for the future ---- agile, flexibly organized, more digital, and highly people-oriented. When we sense we're too far ahead of others and feel like aliens, we may have to admit we aren't terribly patient with established institutions. We want flexibility and elbow room. Sometimes, as a last result, we've been tempted to walk away to save our own souls. Our identity and sense of self-sufficiency is on the line.

But, we haven't lost faith at all or in all. We recognize that it's a good time to adapt, reach out, and grow. We're optimistic and ready to risk. We know God's always leading us, blazing trails for us to follow, if we are willing to step out on faith. With big challenges ahead of us, we believe the Promised Land is looming just over the horizon ahead.

- **Mentor Church.** Two of Dover's suburban churches combine faith and resources to begin Mentor Church, an outreach to Millennials (those born between 1977 and 1995) and their young families. Mentor fully recognizes that it's ministering to a hard-to-reach age group:
  - Leery of institutions, Millennials are the generation least likely to attend church.
  - 60% of Millennials have dropped out of churches and religions.
  - 39% of Millennials find God outside of institutional churches.
  - 35% think churches do more harm than good.
  - Millennials are more apt to come out of fatherless homes than any previous generation.
  - Millennials, soon to be the majority of America's workforce, are most likely to work as freelancers in order to have flexible time to share important life events with their families.

Mentor isn't deterred. Avoiding a church-as-usual approach to ministry, it launches a new generational outreach. Meeting in Short Pump Village's community room, the church makes connections with and creates experiences tailored to Millennials. Since Millennials feel unheard by the church and demand to know the "why's" behind beliefs and actions, the church adopts a "T-E-A" approach to ministry. Meeting only on Sundays, they enjoy TEA --- "Talking," "Eating," and "Acting."

The clergy couple serving in the leader roles call themselves mentors instead of pastors. Rather than formal sermons, they "Talk." Teaching conversationally while seated with the group, these mentors turn the exploration and application of faith and theology into lively and serious discussions. An active "teach-and-text" approach is used for rapid and varied learning. While one mentor-teacher is speaking, the other is texting supportive information or responses to the gathered group. The teachers switch roles back and forth often.

Since Millennials say they're not heard in traditional churches, the gatherings at Mentor are free-flowing conversations with lots of comments, questions, and careful listening. A lot of the conversation centers on call and vocations. Millennials are eager to integrate their lives, their work, and their faith.

Out of this fast-moving give-and-take, participants decide, as a group, how they will respond to God in practical faith. The Sunday gatherings at Mentor combine lively discussion, hymns, a casual lunch for community building (The "Eat" part of the day.), and a hands-on mission project in the afternoon (The "Act" segment of the day.). All of "TEA's" actions are compatible with Millennial's lifestyles.

Knowing Millennials want active heads-up participation and direct hearts-in involvement, Mentor avoids the high-entertainment and low-demand styles of other age-related

churches. Like Mr. Rogers who shaped their childhoods (the Presbyterian minister whose educational television show ran from 1968 until 2001), they're hungry to be neighbors and to belong in a faithful neighborhood.

Recognizing that narrowly age-targeted churches often have a short one-generation shelf life, Mentor uses its weekly mission projects to bridge across the needs of multiple generations. Also realizing they are "digital natives" who are comfortable in a world of pixels, these Millennials reach back to older generations, many of whom are "Gutenbergers" who continue to rely on paper media. Reaching out deliberately, the congregation broadens the age-composition of its own membership, while practicing the Gospel's inclusiveness.

Mentor's ministry style is distinctive. Well-trained couples in healthy families serve as hosts, models, and coaches for gatherings, off-campus conversations, and ministries to and for couples, children, and family members. In financial matters, frugality, transparency, and zero-based budgeting are the norm. Additional conversations and financial seminars explore stewardship for Kingdom work. Taking an adapt-or-perish approach to stay in step with Millennials, Mentor rarely repeats patterns.

- **World Church.** Reflecting Baptists' global mission vision that "God so loved the world," Dover's congregations and WMU jointly launch World Church, a congregation with a "United Nations" flavor. World reaches out to Americans from other global cultures, to international students, workers in the U.S. on work visas, to immigrants, and to refugees. With the globe moving to Central Virginia, our local mission field and its challenges becomes larger and promising.

In terms of only the immigrant segment of their audience, World discovers:

- One in six workers in Virginia is an immigrant.
- One in eight Virginians is an immigrant.
- One fifth of self-employed business owners in Virginia are immigrants.
- One in eleven native-born U.S. citizens has at least one immigrant parent.

World Church reaches out to and includes all of the international groups in the Central Virginia region. Located accessibly in an end space at Virginia Center Commons at the intersection of I-95 and I-295, it becomes a regional congregation. The church staff's diversity mirrors the breadth of its membership. Worship leadership and preaching are shared among the staff, and world music is used. Ministries are offered in English and translated simultaneously into many languages, as needed.

With 20% of Virginia's computer, technology, math, and science jobs filled by immigrants, World is a high-tech, high-touch, mostly digital native congregation. Weekday gatherings are mostly virtual. Cross-cultural events are hosted weekly, and cultural festivals are celebrated several times each year. Mission projects help newcomers to Central Virginia make successful transitions, find "home" again, and attracts participants from other faith backgrounds.

Beyond its worship and discipleship ministries and in addition to its mission projects, World Church learns from Charlottesville's International Neighbors organization. World helps strangers in need become neighbors, and then it helps neighbors become friends (and fellow believers). World focuses its immigrant ministries on transportation, access to health care, assistance with legal documents, clothes and

household closet, English-as-Second Language classes, and job skills and job placement.

In all things, World tries to love the world like God always has and to help the Gospel encircle the globe, beginning here. The world has moved to Dover, and World welcomes all.

- With funding from a Lilly Foundation grant, Dover Association takes a huge step of faith and launches its own research-and-development ministries on site. Two creative initiatives emerge to plant new churches and launch creative ministries.
  - **R&D (Research and Development) Church** becomes Dover's "beta-site congregation," a new church start that prototypes and models leading-edge approaches for congregational life and for community outreach. With its creative mind set, higher-potential but higher-risk ministries can be attempted with more comfort, failure can be seen as an opportunity to learn fast, and better second-chances can be tried with optimism. The church explores the ministry spectrum from contemplative practices for disciples' growth to innovative evangelism to reach new believers. With leadership from WMU and Dover's missions groups, R&D becomes known as "the church without walls" and welcomes what and who comes next.

With print media less used now (and noting that Hanover's Herald-Progress newspaper has closed after 137 years), much of R&D's community building and outreach is through social media. In fact, to prepare for a recent overseas missions event, the church used virtual reality to "visit" and immerse themselves in the new culture in advance. This orientation prepared them better for the unexpected in a different setting and let

them “step” into the new setting with more confidence. After the mission trip, virtual reality was used again to review and deepen their experiences for interpretation. Younger generations and video gamers find this dimension feels natural and stretches their faith.

R&D is populated by younger members, mostly those who envision their faith as edgy and entrepreneurial. Congregational meetings resemble lively think-tank brainstorming sessions. In this atmosphere, R&D reaches out to Baptists and other denominations as faith becomes the ministry baseline and labels fade in importance.

The co-pastors at R&D, a married couple, bring interesting backgrounds to their callings, one a former medical researcher and the other with counselor experience. Both entered ministry as second callings, and they bring new questions and creative attitudes to congregational outlooks.

R&D’s pioneering effort --- exploring and modeling new ministries --- reaches out to diverse communities and creates a distinctive kind of congregational life. Substantial theology anchors R&D, creating stable substance for changing styles of church life. Those who are ready to quench their religious thirst in experiences of deep faith find a “safe house” at R&D.

R&D quickly becomes a teaching church, a model for “new.” Pastors on sabbaticals and seminary students in field ministry assignments come to R&D to awaken vision, expand their ministry horizons, and practice faith in emerging contexts.

- ***Virginia Vision*** provides, in the fashion of business incubators, a “launch lab” for a variety of new ministries. This initiative from Dover creates an entrepreneurial community and site for ministers who are beginning new and free-standing local churches and outreaches. Led by two women ministers, both certified coaches and trained futurists, Virginia Vision provides offices, training, and motivation for generation after generation of ministers for creative ministries. The ministry incubator models options for making future impacts from a stable arm of Dover Association and its churches.

### **In 2025, what kingdom risks will Dover take faith-fully?**

#### Discerning 2025 Dover: New Futures

**All of these scenarios (or combinations of them) are possible by 2025. With these scenarios before us, what basic future questions guide Dover’s discernment about what’s next for its ministry?**

- What will we do new together that we can’t do singly?
- What will we learn about new ministries from each other?
- How will we tackle bigger, newer, and more creative ministry and mission projects together?
- How will our new ministries grow from instruction and inspiration by others’ faith breakthroughs?
- How will we learn to extend our new ministry horizons from each other and from more distant friends?
- How will we develop new local leaders for Dover’s missions and ministries?

In a dynamic world, Dover can’t rest on its laurels. We must actively seek God’s will and look for God’s direction without ceasing.

## As We Discern...

You started your discernment process with our instructions on reading our scenarios. Now, we begin Dover's community stage of discernment. We're not asking that you choose a single scenario from the four you've just read. **The future will be more complex than any one of these scenarios. *Our ears and souls must be attuned to God's Spirit as we discern God's future for us now.***

In Paul's writings, **discernment means "to sift."** Remember the old flour sifter Grandma used when she baked? From less refined flour than we have now, she was finding and preserving finer materials, while discarding the coarser materials. **Together, let's sift out God's next steps for Dover.**

**Sifter #1 ---- PRAY AND THINK "WE," NOT "ME."** As we begin to ask God to show us our best way forward, let's be patient with, attentive to, and supportive of each other. Our spiritual gifts naturally draw us toward ministries that match our gifts; that tendency may cause us to see our futures narrowly. So, each of us now joins the Dover group to clarify God's next kingdom call for us.

**Sifter #2 --- PRAY AND THINK "THEN," NOT "NOW."** Turn your spiritual and mental clocks ahead to 2025, to an emerging world. What will ministry require of us then?

**Sifter #3 --- PRAY AND THINK "SLOWLY," NOT "INSTANTLY."** One of discernment's challenges involves our rates of absorbing, accepting, and adopting new futures. According to research, each of us has an inner clock with its own pre-set paces for dealing with change.

- **2.5%** of us are **INNOVATORS**. We're trailblazers, risk takers, door openers, and change agents. We become peer educators.
- **13.5%** of us are **EARLY ADOPTERS**. We're visionaries, opinion leaders, trend setters, and adventurers. We like to lead the way and try out new ideas.
- **34%** of us form the **EARLY MAJORITY**. We're comfortable with slower change, prefer guidance from trusted sources, and like proven

approaches. We're willing to be opinion leaders too, but at a more pragmatic, deliberate pace.

- Note: **only now, at this third level, has our adoption process reached the 50% level.**
- **34%** of us form the **LATE MAJORITY**. We're more cautious, motivated by tipping points to keep up with our competitors, very cost sensitive, and technologically conservative. We expect bullet-proof solutions and guarantees.
- **16%** of us are **TRADITIONALISTS**. We're more isolated from factors that trigger change, suspicious of new approaches, and apt to maintain the status quo. We're perfectly happy if we don't get the memo about emerging futures.

Let's understand others' adoption rates. Let's not isolate others who follow a different time clock. But, let's not allow the tardiest voice to determine our future together.

**Sifter #4 --- PRAY AND THINK BEYOND "US" AND "THEM."** When we face big challenges like discerning God's future for us, expect some polarities to emerge. Let's talk and listen together. Let's walk in each other's shoes. Let's watch for both-and possibilities.

**Sifter #5 --- PRAY FOR LOTS OF JOY BUT BE READY FOR SOME GRIEF.** In almost every transition in life and ministry, we feel the anticipation of new choices, while also feeling grief pangs over some things we leave behind. Let go, and let God lead us forward.

**Sifter #6 --- PRAY TOGETHER AND THINK TOGETHER...BEGINNING NOW!** It's time to sift.

## **DOVER'S CHALLENGES: Seven Modest Proposals**

How will Dover, a volunteer network of nearly 70 faith-based communities across an 80 mile by 40 mile region, serve this area faithfully in ways that honor and glorify God?

**In 2025, why will our churches band together, other churches join us, volunteer in, and give to Dover's shared futures?**

- **To discover God's kingdom together:** churches see God's kingdom coming to earth in different places and in diverse ways across Dover. Our understanding of God's expansive kingdom is broadened when we see God at work in varied contexts and cultures within Dover.
- **For greater ministry impact together:** churches take part in Dover to multiply their missions and ministries together. We bolster each other in Dover, and our witness beyond Dover is strengthened.
- **To unite and expand faith communities together:** churches take part in Dover to enjoy fellowship, do ministry, and grow in unity. Then, others will want to join the family circle, and God's kingdom grows.

In summary, **churches are much stronger together. So, in 2025, as God renews our minds, awakens our eyes, and opens new horizons to us, how will we be creative catalysts for God's kingdom?**

First, we are **STRONGER TOGETHER** when **we welcome God's kingdom.**

**Creating a Testimony of Faith as a Theological North Star** --- Let's begin at the beginning --- our foundation in biblical faith --- and add a testimony of faith. **Dover Baptist Association is more than an ordinary organization or business. We are a distinctive, collaborative Christian community of faith and practice. Our leaders and churches serve God's kingdom, participating in bringing heaven to earth.** Theologically and practically, we believe in common calling, congregational freedom, and ministry cooperation among all of our partner churches.

Second, we are STRONGER TOGETHER when **we tell the world what Dover's mission is.**

**“Empowering Leaders-for-Churches, Equipping Churches-for-Mission”**

Our future ministry as an association focuses on (1) **healthier leaders** and (2) **higher impact congregations**. This is Dover's mission.

Third, we are STRONGER TOGETHER when **we empower leaders-for-churches and equip churches-for-mission.**

**Focusing Dover's Ministries and Resources on Two Ministry Targets and Fulfilling These Two Callings with God's Help.**

- **(1) Dover will focus on *EMPOWERING LEADERS-FOR-CHURCHES*.**  
Developing and cascading the strengths of our leaders throughout our churches and across our association is our beginning point.
  - **GROWING LEADERS-FOR-CHURCHES (DBA as LEADER INCUBATOR)**
    - **Strengthening Leaders and Raising Standards through an Incubator Approach**
      - **Creating peer-based growth groups for maturity, skills, and support**
      - **Combining soul-care with self-care to establish an anchoring base for leaders**
      - **Assisting new leaders in “Good Starts” (Bundling coaching services for Search Committees and then for newly arrived pastors and staff ministers for seamless and sturdy ministry start-ups)**
      - **Growing our leaders through**
        - **Better Questions --- Coach training to provide “thought partners” within a discernment culture**

- Longer Horizons --- Futures training for longer-term and healthier congregational ministries, perhaps creating a Dover “NuOps” team to identify new ministry and missions opportunities
- Greater Depth --- Innovation training labs to explore creative, emergent, developmental ministries and missions
- **Developing and Deepening Key Congregational Leaders**
  - Anchoring deacons and moderators along with program, ministries, and mission leaders
  - Coaching search, personnel, finance, and mediation committees and teams
- **(2) Dover will also focus on *EQUIPPING CHURCHES-FOR-MISSION*.** We will strengthen and cluster our leaders, our congregations, and our ministry partners together around our central ministries for greater Kingdom impact.
  - **GROUPING CHURCHES-IN-MINISTRY (DBA as *MINISTRY ACCELERATOR*)**
    - **Mobilizing and Accelerating Ministry and Missions Together**
      - Clustering churches of varying strengths for mutual support and for partnered local ministries
      - Clustering shared community ministries around Dover’s natural travel corridors
      - Starting new churches and ministries together
      - Partnering for regional, national, and global missions projects and relationships

- **Supporting Churches for Ministry Together**
  - **Upgrading Dover’s building for use as a ministry resource center and retreat site**
  - **Exploring the creation of a group health insurance pool**

**Four, we are STRONGER TOGETHER when we simplify structures and focus resources to support our mission**

Picture a **mobile** with a central hanger, a **strategic planning leader team**, to anchor us and three balanced communities to lead our common ministries.

- **DBA’S MISSION COUNCIL: Helping God’s Kingdom Come in Dover’s Part of the Earth**

**Create 3 “Leader Communities” (of 7-10 persons) for our Mission Council, each led by teams of 3** (with staggered terms of 3 years...so there is always experience and continuity mixed with new leaders and ideas).

- **DOVER’S FUTURES COMMUNITY: Focusing Ministry forward on God’s Emerging Kingdom** (including Partnerships, WMU, a new futurist/innovation cluster, Trustees, church planters, and others to plan for and keep our mission primary in the future)
- **DOVER’S RESOURCE COMMUNITY: Stewarding Current Gifts and Income for God’s Kingdom** (including Finance/Budget Committees, Scholarships, Grants, Property, and others to manage our resources well)

- **DOVER'S LEADER DEVELOPMENT COMMUNITY: Equipping Congregational Ministry Leaders for God's Growing Kingdom** [including Personnel Committee, a new Leader Incubator, and Church Program Ministries (Sunday School, Youth Activities, Senior Adult Events, other age/interest-related groups, etc.) and others to grow congregational leaders]

Fifth, we are **STRONGER TOGETHER** when **we honor tradition and invite innovation**

- **Keeping Dover's historic name**, an honored legacy, proudly.
- **Considering an innovative leader title**, changing from administrative terms to more catalytic and future-oriented descriptions. Evaluate staff titles to match mission and ministries.
- **Designing our Annual and Semi-Annual Meetings as new ministry experiences** rather than mostly business meetings:
  - Celebrating successes and telling stories that put faces on ministries where we've joined in God's work (with an upbeat tone and mood),
  - Discerning directions (do necessary business, but move forward with focus)
  - Creating new ministry experiences (as our primary ministry modeling and motivating activity).
- **Calling out congregational storytellers to share what God's doing in our churches and region for illumination and imagination.** Equip digital and print communicators, provide video equipment, and train storytellers. (Remember that ancient cultures valued two kinds of leaders equally--- hunters who provided meat and storytellers who provided meaning.)
- **Evaluating our regional clusters for more impact and access** around our primary traffic-ways.

- **Proposing ways to track contacts for leader development and empowerment primarily**, with church visits as an additional measure.

Sixth, we are **STRONGER TOGETHER** when **our administrative practices are rooted in our mission and our documents are up-to-date**

- **Updating guiding documents and practices**
- **Updating personnel policies**
- **Upgrading communication, including aligning our message with our mission and creating a new logo for our brand**
- **Upgrading the hosting capacity of our building with full connectivity and a welcoming atmosphere**

Seventh, we are **STRONGER TOGETHER** when **we continuously seek innovative ways to be wise stewards of Dover's resources**

- **Exploring health benefits cost-sharing arrangements** in which Dover pays a portion and employees pay a portion of benefit costs
- **Exploring potential advantages of outsourcing payroll and financial duties** (costs, timeliness, larger resource pool - guaranteed back-up support, knowledge of tax laws, and submission of IRS filings)
- **Considering**, through attrition, replacing two part-time staff members with **one full-time staff member for administrative continuity and consistency**
- **Leveraging technology and communication infrastructure enhancements and innovative processes** that promote administrative efficiency and accuracy
- **Identifying and implementing cost savings measures**
  - Evaluate the pros/cons of office closure on Fridays
  - Develop an on-line Annual Church Profile (ACP)
  - Transition Dover Diary from paper to digital publication and update and maintain current distribution list

- **Consolidating multiple databases** for efficiency and accuracy
- **Documenting and maintaining current administrative processes to allow for in-office back-up support**
- **Reviewing vendor contracts annually** (for cost, quality, timeliness, functionality, and accessibility)

## **DOVER'S FUTURE: A Community Legacy at a Crossroads**

**Dover stands at a crossroads in time and opportunity.** We have a legacy of heritage and faith to extend. As a community of nearly seventy churches, **future choices for missions and ministries are ours to make --- now --- together.**

**Dover's future path is illuminated by Scripture's long story of communities of faith in search for God's mission for them.** From Israel's twelve tribes to Jesus' twelve apostles, biblically-based groups, just like us, explored God's adventures in faith for them.

- **Hebrews 11**, the Hall of Fame of Old Testament leaders, reminds us that faith (1) fills us with hope, (2) makes us certain God will do things we haven't seen or even imagined yet, and (3) makes us capable of things only God can fathom and empower. **May God amaze Dover with ministries that emerge before and from us too.**
- **Matthew 1:1-17** records Jesus' family tree spanning across forty-two generations. Redemption is God's primary and patient work. We follow a long line of redeemed women and men. Now, each of us are witnesses within our spheres of influence. **May God continue to use Dover in His unbroken redemptive legacy as well.**
- **Romans 16**, Paul's "thank you note" to the men and women who planted the first Christian church in that great city, names the varied contributions and sacrifices each leader made to the vitality of the congregation. Some publically hosted the house church, some worked quietly behind the scenes to create a hospitable atmosphere for gatherings, and all were witnesses to the power of Christ. **May God show each of us our specific roles in Dover's new adventures in ministry daily.**

We know these biblical stories and believe them. Now is the time and the opportunity to discern Dover's future role in God's will and to live it fully.

**This is Dover's moment. May God show us our next steps and our longer future.**

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DOVER BAPTIST ASSOCIATION,  
11006 LAKERIDGE PARKWAY,  
ASHLAND, VA 23005.**