

NAFWB SWOT Analysis Findings

I. Key Findings and Strategic Recommendations

1. **The historic commitment of Free Will Baptists to the Bible and to doctrine is alive and well among these leaders and is a core strength to be built upon.** In a time when movements are abandoning their historic commitments and fighting about the essentials, the team of FWB leaders surveyed stand strongly together on their shared heritage. They see losing this heritage as a threat that must be avoided.

Questions for strategy development

- 1) *What are we doing (specifically) to ensure that this critical differentiator and foundation be guarded at all cost?*
- 2) *What is in place to help as we skillfully hand-off the stewardship of these historic commitments to a new generation of young FWB leaders?*
- 3) *Who are the essential leaders who can superintend this – both older and younger?*

2. **FWB leaders believe the denomination is experiencing an unusual time of unity among its leaders and churches. This is a strength to be solidified and leveraged moving forward.**

Respondents talk about past disunity and conflict in contrast to a current climate of unity and cooperation among FWBs. Not only is this a strength, but it is clearly a blessing which should be cultivated further. Aside from avoiding the damage and lack of progress caused by discord; unity can be a great help as FWBs struggle together against the threats coming from a hostile culture. Unity is also a magnetic characteristic of those who are nurturing the young leaders who are so vital to the continuation of the movement – it can attract the right ones. Developing unity among the leadership is seen by many as the most important thing the Executive office can do to help. “Division among leaders” is the third most mentioned category of weakness – working for continued unity is an area that requires unrelenting diligence.

Questions for strategy development

- 1) *Do we fully understand why we are experiencing a time of unity and harmony – and what is essential to keep it going?*
- 2) *Who are the key stake holders, leaders, influencers and opinion makers who can help or hinder this unity?*



- 3) *Is there more to be done – are there places among FWBs where this unity has not fully been realized?*
- 4) *As we depend on the Holy Spirit as our source, what can we do to maintain unity, recognize potential threats and deal proactively with them?*

3. The denomination needs a shared vision moving forward – it is an area of weakness and many see it as an opportunity to make things better. Related to the idea of past disagreement is the sense that the denomination has lacked a shared vision. It is not clear that all who talk about vision are expressing the same exact ideas, but it is obvious the general idea is widespread. The result of this phenomenon is an inability to work together with focus. Some talk about the silos they see in the various departments and the multiple agendas. There is obviously a collective interest in having a shared vision that will pull the denomination (and the departments) together so that as a whole much more may be accomplished. It appears these leaders would look to the Executive Office to lead in this area.

Questions for strategy development

- 1) *Do we fully understand all the reasons (ecclesiological, philosophical, practical, personal, etc.) FWB leadership has not intentionally cast a single unifying vision for the movement in the past?*
- 2) *What does the process of developing and sharing a unified vision look like in a less-connectional denomination like FWB (where churches are independent and autonomous) – to maximize adoption by as many leaders, pastors and churches possible?*
- 3) *What areas does such a vision need to address and include – to be appropriate and effective?*
- 4) *Who are the essential stakeholders (whose involvement is critical); how and when must they be engaged in the process to help make it successful?*
- 5) *What are the challenges that must be considered*
- 6) *How can such a vision be shared to create ownership across the movement?*

4. Leaders have a lot to say about younger FWBs and seem to believe they should be a critical focus. This subject is seen in all four SWOT categories – primarily as both an opportunity for good things and as a threat if neglected. Respondents see the youth of the denomination as key to the future. This subject emerges as important or at least noteworthy in all four SWOT categories. These leaders have younger FWBs on their minds



more than most every other subject. The current investments in youth (including programs like Truth & Peace and E-TEAM) are seen as moderate strengths, but the lack of a pipeline and process effectively guiding youth from these programs into full adult engagement in churches and the denomination is a challenge. Lack of more young people and leaders is a less mentioned threat. The potential of pouring into the younger generations is the top opportunity. Not involving youth moving forward is the third most mentioned threat. Free Will Baptist Leaders know young people are the future – in most every way.

Questions for strategy development

- 1) *How can we engage more young people – especially leaders – in providing their opinions and feedback?*
- 2) *What is the current situation with FWB youth (18 and under) and young adults (under 30) – the “state of affairs?”*
- 3) *What is the “problem” a focus on youth would be trying to solve (problem definition seems critical)?*
- 4) *Who are the most critical stakeholders, opinion leaders and influencers who can help to ensure that youth-targeted initiatives are on trend and effective (under 35/under 25)?*
- 5) *What does it look like to fully engage younger FWBs (begin with the end in mind)?*

5. **These FWB leaders believe the denomination needs to be much more effective in the areas of education and training. The lack of these is causing a significant adverse impact with leaders and in churches.** The leaders who participated in the research talk about untrained leaders and pastors – it is the weakness they talk about most. There is a lack of programs and training opportunities. The result of this is that poorly trained leaders have weak doctrine which damages churches and ultimately the FWB movement. Respondents see training as a critical component of preparing the next generation of FWB leaders (one of the topics mentioned in many responses. “Training/education” is the second most mentioned opportunity in the SWOT. “Training/education” is also the fourth most mentioned way respondents believe the Executive Office can serve the departments and denomination.

Questions for strategy development

- 1) *What specifically is the shortcoming as it relates to education and training these leaders are referring to (doctrinal, practical, vocational for roles, etc.)? (Problem definition)*
- 2) *What training programs currently exist across the denomination that are meant to prepare leaders?*



- 3) *What standards are generally in place in local areas (associations, conferences, etc.) to encourage pastors to pursue training?*
- 4) *What training is in place specifically for young people to raise up future FWB leaders?*
- 5) *Who needs to be involved in efforts to address this issue?*

6. **Leaders propose that the NAFWB Executive office can make things better by fostering unity and casting vision. Departments also want the office to promote the work.** Some of these leaders seem to have a strong sense of what the Executive Office should do to impact the denomination. The core strength of denominational unity is one of the issues leaders believe the Executive Office can and should promote and impact. In addition, they see the Executive office as the entity that needs to be the source of a unifying vision. These two – unity and a vision – apply to the departments working together and becoming more effective as well as to the entire denomination. These leaders also see the Executive Office as the primary promoter of the denomination, and this should include promoting the work of the various departments.

Questions for strategy development

- 1) *See #2 related to denominational unity.*
- 2) *Who needs to be involved in the process of developing a vision that can be owned and supported across the denomination?*
- 3) *How do the national departments fit into a unifying vision – what input and involvement should they have in developing it?*
- 4) *What are the critical issues the denomination is facing that must be addressed/included in a unifying vision?*
- 5) *(Related to departmental unity/promotion) How will the Executive Office systematically receive feedback from the departments to effectively represent and promote them?*

7. **The greatest threat FWB leaders mention comes from contemporary trends. They describe the current cultural milieu as unfriendly and even hostile to Christianity and they know it will be challenging to negotiate.** Leaders see the changes in the ways people think in the current cultural moment culture as creating a growing hostility toward conservative Christians and churches. They see this as a very real threat that must be dealt with in the future as Free Will Baptists work to continue to walk in obedience to the call of God on the movement.

Questions for strategy development



- 1) *How can the leadership of the denomination be as informed as possible about the changes and challenges that will have the most adverse impacts on the denomination and its churches?*
- 2) *What task forces, commissions, or other ad-hoc groups need to be put in place to disseminate information, provide advice and counsel, and help leaders and churches deal with what is coming?*
- 3) *What legal advice and counsel will be necessary?*
- 4) *What partnerships need to be established with other like-minded (Evangelical) organizations to provide mutual encouragement, advice, and support?*
- 5) *What services, such as: information, hotlines, legal counsel on retainer or other resources should be made available to FWBs to help moving into this uncertainty?*

8. **As a next potential step in the near future, think about what other feedback may be needed to validate and verify these findings – also to discover other critical opinions and perspectives that might paint a complete picture.** The feedback captured in this SWOT exercise with leaders is very valuable and actionable. To gain a more complete picture of the perceptions of others in the denomination, it would be helpful to hear from others (as it is feasible to do so).

Questions for strategy development

- 1) *How can we disseminate some of these results to gain ownership and to create opportunities for others to confirm, disconfirm or add to them?*
- 2) *What other categories of stakeholders might it be valuable to hear from?*

9. **This work provides the Executive Office with strong direction to move forward on some clearly defined priorities.** There is a lot of agreement around many of the ideas in the SWOT analysis and this not only provides direction, but should also inspire confidence to move forward.

II. Survey General Findings

A. STRENGTHS

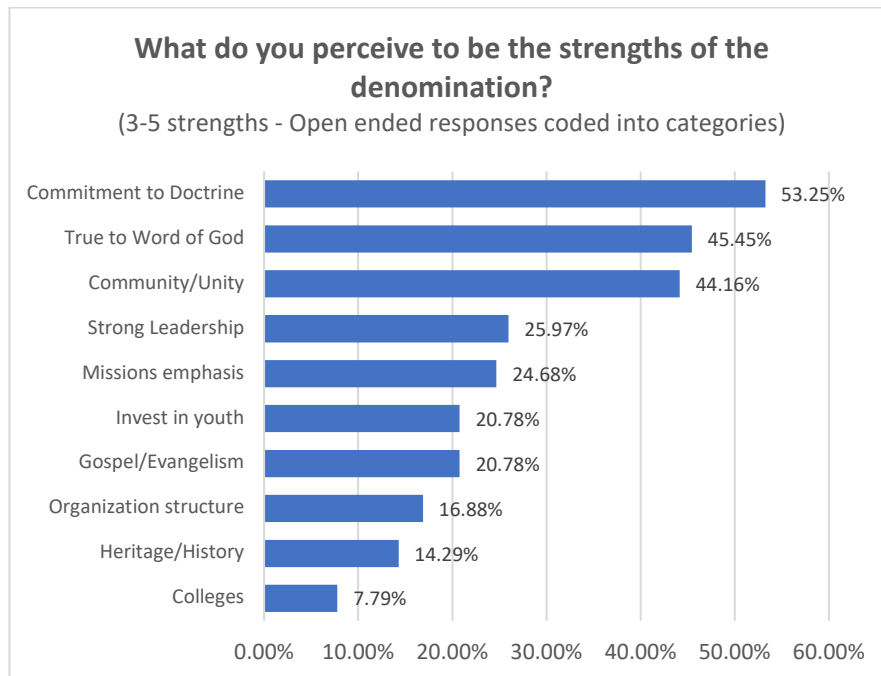
- Respondents shared several strengths of the Free Will Baptist (FWB) denomination. They mention a commitment to solid doctrine and staying true to the Word of God most



frequently. Some see this reflected in the longstanding FWB heritage, new current leadership, and some say they hope to see it as a value in the next generation of leaders.

- *the FWB denomination has a tradition of adhering to Biblical doctrine and Truth*
 - *Our doctrine in our strength. The Holy Scriptures as the inspired Word of God. Our stand against the decaying sins of the culture. Godly leaders who are willing to take a stand against and morality in the culture and even churches, and who stand for the truth.*
 - *Our core beliefs are strong and aren't an area of debate.*
 - *It doctrinal commitment to biblical, evangelical, orthodox, Arminian theology.*
 - *Clear classic Christian doctrinal identity.*
 - *Doctrinal stability and faithfulness Excellent leadership in key positions Rich Heritage*
 - *our core beliefs - inspiration of Scripture, authority of the Word of God, salvation by faith in Christ alone,*
 - *Our pretty-much denomination-wide commitment to the Bible as the Word of God, and to the core doctrines of the Christian faith. We're a Bible-believing people.*
 - *The unwavering doctrine*
- Respondents also mentioned the improvements they have observed in community and unity within the denomination as strengths. Many comments were made about past struggles with the lack of unity; they note the strides toward unity in recent years.
 - *More fellowship than in other denominations*
 - *Our people love to come together and learn, grow, and fellowship in one place. People love to plan their year around National.*
 - *Sense of community*
 - *There seems to be a renewed sense of unity*
 - *I believe that our people are most excited about a growing spirit of unity among FWBs that has not always existed. It is a positive thing for us as we join to fight the forces of darkness and cease to fight against each other.*
 - *No major disharmony in the denomination*
 - *We are currently more unified than I have ever know us to be. There is a greater spirit of cooperation on a national level.*
 - *Greater harmony. At least on the national level we are not arguing and fighting about things that don't matter. Certainly not as much as we used to.*





B. WEAKNESSES

- Education and training were the most commonly mentioned weakness of the FWB denomination. According to respondents, education about denominational doctrine and biblical literacy is lacking. Training for pastors, deacons, and laymen (even in the ordination process) are seen as weak by some. Others note the lack/unavailability of resources to provide needed training.
 - *We don't value education and training.*
 - *Weak, undiscerning, untrained ministers Pastor/missionaries adhering to unsound doctrine. e.g. Pastor/missionaries promoting the "saying YES to Jesus". There is much more involved in the reception of true salvation than just saying yes to Jesus! Pastor/church leaders/missionaries attending conferences that promote unsound doctrines and practices in ministry. E.g. Association of Related Church Conference that I understand to have guest speakers who I consider to be outright heretics! This is troubling! There must be a re-emphasis on teaching FWB sound doctrine!*
 - *Weak process of training and ordaining ministers and deacons Lack of emphasis on laity and women Not enough emphasis on education*
 - *insufficient training of pastors in theology*

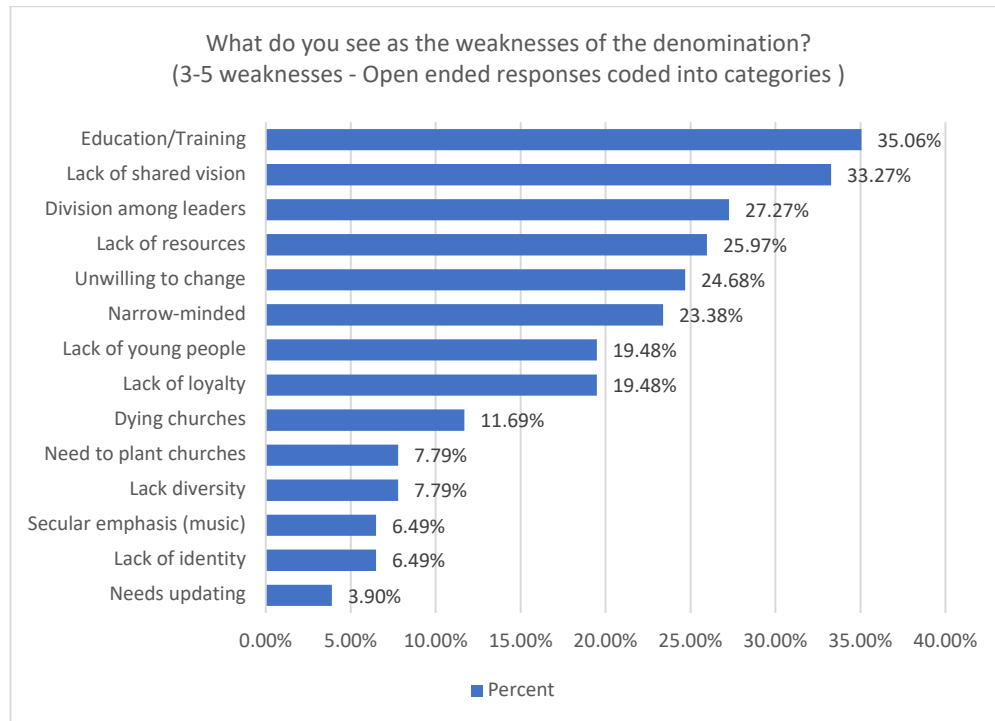


- *Lack of ministry training programs*
- *The lack of teaching and explaining our doctrine*
- Lack of a shared vision (that creates unity) among ministry leaders and agencies were also mentioned by many respondents. Personal preferences and past relational hurdles are shared as top reasons for disunity.
 - *When speaking of our weaknesses, I will start with unity. As a millennial, I sense the next wave of Free Will Baptist leaders are moving beyond the rifts that have sharply divided our group in the past. This is reassuring and gives me great hope for the future. We need to continue to work toward reconciliation and healing so that our focus is not on the "minors" where we differ but the gospel and Christ's command to engage the culture and take His Truth to the ends of the earth... I believe there needs to be a broader denominational conversation about vision and how we should work together to use our limited resources in the most effective way possible.*
 - *Lack of vision for past few decades*
 - *Division*
 - *The departments seem to be headed in different directions. There is a lack of communication between departments, there are often inefficiencies in duplication of work and efforts, and even at times a spirit of competition for resources and the attention of the movement.*
 - *A key weakness I see is our inability—perhaps unwillingness—to function together as a single unit. There are at least three reasons for this. Sometimes this occurs not because of any bad blood but because different agencies, leaders, etc. are just kind oblivious being kings of their own castles not thinking about the broader continent and world (so to speak). The more that our leaders and agencies can come together and collaborate, and the more that such collaborations would/could be the subject of news releases, the better I believe, and it would signal to the denomination a certain spirit of unity. A second and third reason why this sometimes occurs is because of (2) bad blood and (3) cross visions, which I will consider together. I recognize, realistically, that some bridges are simply burnt (it would seem). I also recognize that people don't always trust other people (and sometimes for good reason). I recognize that the statement, "Can't we all just get along?" can evidence a naivete. And yet I believe it's a weakness. Surely there's a way for people to work together in a manner that is cautious and prudent and yet also reconciliatory. I believe this is a potential weakness—and perhaps even a threat—*



because it results in a splintering of the denomination, a polarity among people and constituencies, and a lack of confidence in leaders and agencies. Surely there's a way to encourage and promote one another and one another's agencies even where leaders have histories and cross purposes or different visions

- *lack of vision*
- *lack of an overarching denominational vision*
- *tendency toward disunity based on personal preference*



C. OPPORTUNITIES

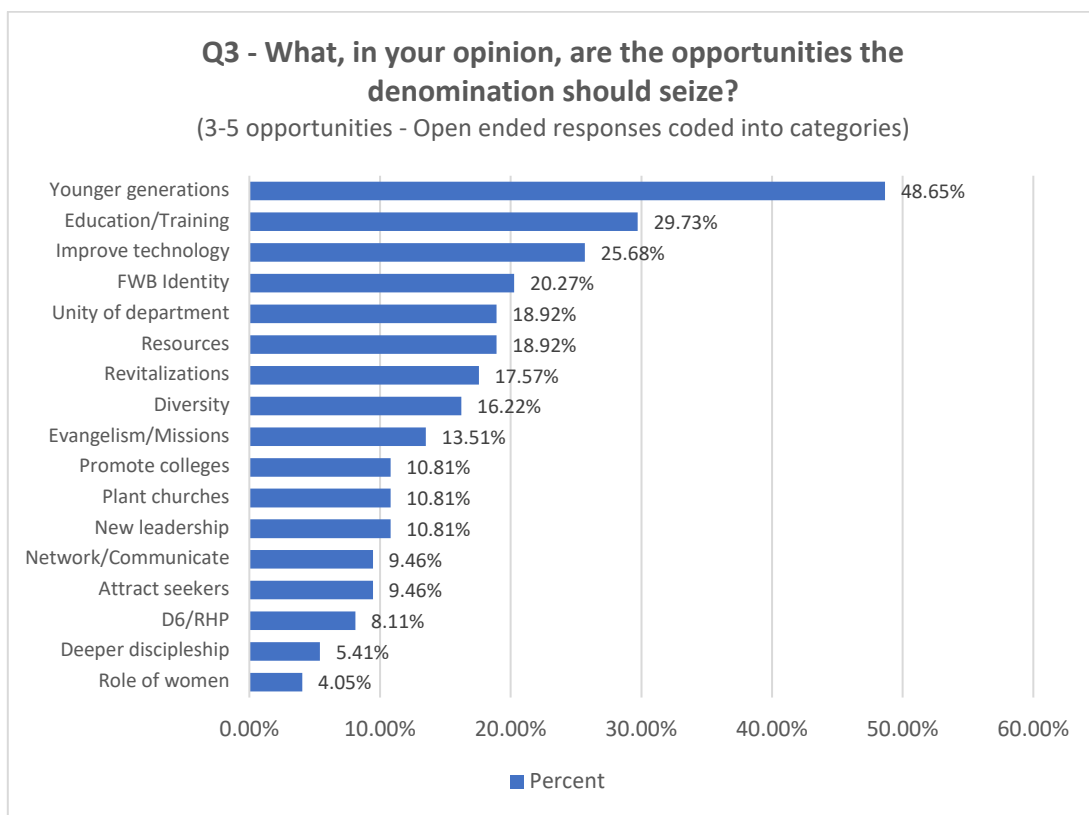
- The FWB denomination has a great opportunity to invest in its youth. Respondents mentioned some of the strong programming for youth (e.g., Truth and Peace and ETEAM) as valuable assets, but they see them as an unseized opportunity believing FWBs are losing some of their best young leaders to other denominations. Failing to take advantage of this potential pipeline has contributed to a lack of qualified leaders and pastors. Some even connect this to the decline and closing of churches.
 - *Lack of pastors and no young men coming up to take over the leadership of the denomination.*
 - *Few future ministers being trained*



- *Scared of the young and what they may want to bring to the church*
 - *Not reaching millennials*
 - *No incentives for young men to be pastors*
 - *We are not bridging the gap between generations well.*
 - *-lack of sufficient number of people called into ministry -related to first one, insufficient number of pastoral graduates from Bible colleges to fill spots left by retiring/aging ministers. -*
- Respondents suggest that FWBs must start investing in the development of young leaders within the denomination. They warn that there may be a shortage of qualified and trained leaders in the very near future. Congregants, pastors and even denominational leaders are aging, and respondents are concerned about this for the future. There is an opportunity to raise up new leaders.
 - *1. Lack of stability and outreach to our own FWB young people ages 18 - 35. 2. Challenge to our young men especially to follow God's calling in their lives. 3. Mentoring.*
 - *We have gifted thinkers who need to speak to issues of great concern to the church, but they rarely ever have a denominational platform to minister to us.*
 - *The greatest opportunity is in regards to developing future leaders. Our high school students have top-notch leadership programs, and because of their involvement in these ministries, many of them find their way into our colleges. I think a large-scale mentorship/internship program for those focused on church ministry would produce a lot of fruit.*
 - *We MUST find ways to ground the younger (and some of the older ones too) in biblical truth. If we don't accomplish this quickly, we will fail as a denomination, in my humble opinion.*
 - *The FWB should seize the opportunity to have young ministers-in-training come to preach in their churches (but should not be afraid to offer constructive criticism to the preaching or overall impression that the minister-in-training is portraying). 2. The FWB denomination should seize the opportunity to train the young people within the churches how to evangelize where they are now, rather than using generalizations*
 - *Training for the next generation of leaders. Connect the young preachers to denominational leadership through mentoring.*



- *Young adults. FWB would do well if we invested in the lives of young people. Though we have many great opportunities such as T&P, ETEAM and others, we are deficient in developing young adults into church leadership.*
- *Change. Listen to your people and to your youth. All the power and decision making lies in the hands of old men in this denomination.*
- *Truth and Peace graduates to be sought after by local churches to retain them and their abilities to assist in their growth. 5) cultivate the younger leaders (onto our national boards, national positions, agency personnel, etc.)*
- *Young people that want to make an impact for God. Many are committed to ministry and missions and will serve with or without us.*



D. THREATS

- The most frequently mentioned threat to the FWB denomination is the hostility in today’s culture aimed at Christian teaching and people of faith. The potential for the culture to infiltrate the church, its doctrine and practices is among the threats listed.



- *Human brokenness and the growing unfriendliness (and even hostility) to Truth and Faith. Though this is certainly a threat, it is also an opportunity to faithfully minister Truth and impact the culture for Christ and His Kingdom.*
- *more outright disdain for traditional Christian beliefs, lack of religious tolerance in culture and politics for Christian tradition*
- *Rapidly growing contrast between conservative values and the culture- we appear as hatemongers to the culture*
- *1. LGBT 2. Abortion 3. Not willing to move into the 21st century but to be careful to know not all things “on the move” are a move in the right direction*
- *LGBTQ Issues. Every church in our country will probably be faced with how to deal with these issues in the next few years. Laws may change to be even more unfavorable to those who hold a Biblical position on this issue. Public opinion is already changing at a fast pace.*
- *We have to be careful that we don't allow our culture, in any way, to slip in and undermine our biblical beliefs. It always happens slowly and subtly. If it can happen during the apostolic age in can certainly happen in the twenty-first century.*
- *- Temptation to compromise the Scripture in order to relate to the culture -*
- *Dilution of our theology due to pressure from culture*

- **Some research participants see neglecting FWB heritage as a major threat. What Free Will Baptists have been historically, in doctrine and practice, is under threat from FWB members’ apathy towards denominational distinctives. Some use terms like “identity crisis” to describe this phenomenon.**
 - *Identity crisis: Downplaying our FWB theological and ecclesial heritage will destroy our denomination.*
 - *Denominational decline because we have an identity crisis and are ashamed of being FWB Growth of charismatic practices in evangelicalism influencing FWBs Continued watering down of FWB distinctives in favor of non-denominationalism*
 - *Two threats challenge us, the first being that we are engulfed into larger movements which promise more excitement. The second threat is that we are abandoned because we are not current with modern social trends. For these reasons, it is important that we maintain and emphasize our doctrinal distinctness. That we maintain our emphasizes on the sufficiency of Scripture.*

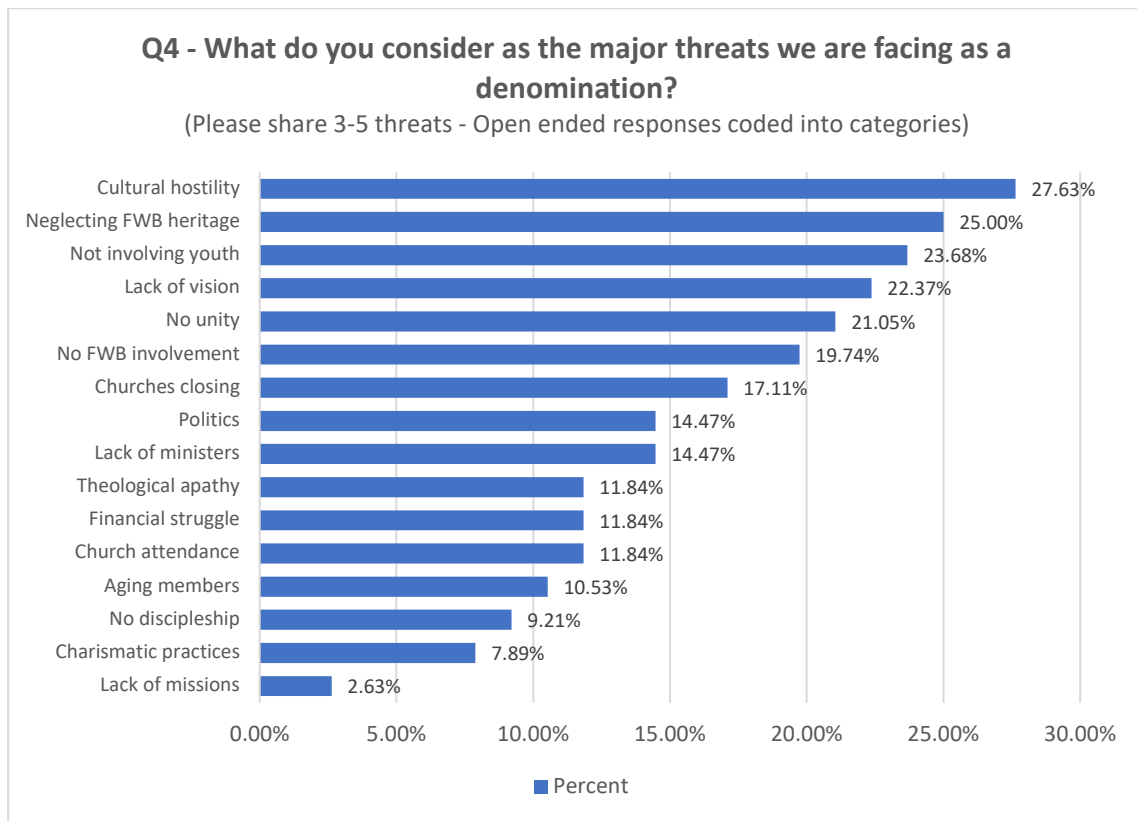


- *Neglect of--if not active resistance to--our denominational distinctives and identity. Our traditional (covenant) commitment to total abstinence and the ordinance of foot-washing might be two examples. Another could be the removal of denominational identity from our church names and signs.*
- *Lack of loyalty to our denomination*
- Some respondents believe not involving youth is another major threat to the denomination. They suggest that without investing in the younger generation of leaders and youth, the FWB denomination will soon be in crisis. Targeting Gen Z and millennials is of utmost importance in planning for the future leadership of Free Will Baptists, their agencies, and churches.
 - *overlooking college age students & their role in the denomination*
 - *Lack of younger leadership and innovation at the state and denominational levels*
 - *The lack of mentoring new youth leaders - instead of teaching or supporting, there is often a micro-managing, dictatorial, and negative approach which is discouraging and pushing the young leaders away from ministry*
 - *Age. It seems as though it's a distinct possibility that the denomination may end in my lifetime purely because, once the boomer generation is gone, there may not be enough FWBs left to properly constitute a denomination. The vast majority of my peers (currently in their 30s-40s) that I grew up with in FWBs are no longer FWB. Most of them weren't lost to the "world," but to other churches. I believe we face an existential threat if we cannot recapture and integrate a substantial volume of people in generations Y and Z into our churches and denomination over the next 10-20 years.*
 - *A major threat is the changing demographic and the failure of the church to target the next generation.*
 - *Not transitioning fast enough to attract/retrain the millennials and generation Z. If everything we do is about appeasing the boomers (who have supported and carried us to our present state) then we will continue to need hospice care for our denomination. We need multi-generational respect, fellowship, discipleship, mentoring, and investment.*
- Lack of vision (unity) also is frequently mentioned as a threat. Respondents say the lack of clear direction, division, and failure to change are major concerns. Many see the agencies and departments within the denomination as “silos,” suggesting they will fail apart from



one another; they suggest the whole can thrive with a unified vision under strong leadership.

- *No clear plan or path for developing and integrating leaders at local, state, and national levels. No succession plan in churches, associations, state, and national boards, etc.*
- *Lack of clear direction moving forward*
- *Aging pastors and denominational leadership (at all levels) that are either resigned to the status quo or unwilling to do the work of renewing vision and building the church (and denomination)*
- *Departments of the denomination maintaining a “silo” approach with limited partnership and interaction to develop strategies involving multiple agencies.*
- *Failure to change. Failure to adapt practices and thinking to younger culture. Attitude toward leaders who have failed and our lack of willingness to restore. Out of date/wording of church covenant.*



EXECUTIVE OFFICE SUPPORT

- Respondents have ideas about how the Executive Office can provide support in a few ways:



- They mention encouraging unity among all departments
- Promoting each department
- Providing educational tools, trainings, and resources for pastors, laymen, and the other denominational departments.
 - *Executive office should be the bridge builder of the denomination connecting the silos of ministry to one another so that the silos can be taken down.*
 - *Emphasize unity among the departments. Promote each other in a positive way.*
 - *1. Unify departments. 2. Promote all departments 3. Stay abreast of messaging by department so we can all speak with one voice.*
 - *sincere promotion of all the agencies is needed encouraging the agencies to work together*
 - *communicating not only the needs but the initiatives of ALL the departments and how they work together toward common goals.*
 - *Facilitate interaction between our departments to develop consolidated strategies and goals. Provide avenues for local pastors and leaders to benefit from training and resources that our agencies can provide*

