

**Eastern Regional Association
Advent Christian General Conference**

10-16-09

Report of the Superintendent

Clinton E. Taber

Good morning. I greet you in the name of Jesus, Lord of the Church, Lord of the Advent Christian Church – a fellowship of believers in the Lord Jesus Christ, our Savior, Redeemer, and soon coming King!

Next year at this time, we will be celebrating the 150th anniversary of the founding of the Advent Christian denomination, originally as the Christian Association, at Providence, RI. At that first meeting, officers and directors were named and instructions were given to call an organizational meeting of the group before November 10th. The organizational meeting was held in Salem, Massachusetts on October 16, 1860 and lasted until October 18 around noon. Some things never change. It was at this meeting that the name was changed from the Christian Association to Advent Christian Association. The Advent Christian denomination was born.

The mission of the Adventists was to sound the alarm concerning the end of the age and the Second Coming of Jesus Christ. The motivating factor for organization was to have a responsible entity in place to manage the Crisis and other publications as a means of getting the message out and reaching the lost.

The denomination has made a valuable contribution to the Kingdom of God. God has used us as a denomination in spite of our theological pluralism and in spite of our dysfunctional polity. Only eternity will reveal the thousands, the hundreds of thousands, possibly even millions who over this span of time have been added to the Kingdom through the faithful service of pastors and missionaries in bearing witness to the Gospel. Churches and institutions of the denomination have touched

thousands of lives here in North America and around the world with the love of Jesus. People living in darkness have seen a great light because of the outreach of this denomination. Hurting, struggling, and hopeless lives have been relieved, reclaimed, and given hope. God has used us as a denomination. We celebrate His faithfulness, His goodness, and His grace! To God be the glory!

Most people think that the early Adventists were one happy family gathering in halls and tents while awaiting the imminent return of the Lord. Meetings were characterized by singing, shouting, and preaching! What an exciting time to be alive and serving the Lord.

The fact of the matter is that the early Adventists came together from several different denominations bringing their theological baggage with them. Theological baggage is difficult to discard. It would have been well if there had been a TSS in place (TSS stands for Theological Security System) that could have rummaged through all that baggage and weeded out what was illegitimate & unorthodox. Such was not the case. Consequently, the denomination was birthed with a convoluted set of Biblical understandings that have plagued us from the beginning.

In spite of these conflicting theological understandings, the belief in the imminent return of Christ lit their fire and over-rode their differences. Christ was coming soon and people needed to be saved. Those who were a part of this God-breathed movement were committed to reaching the lost. Don't miss that understanding in all the discussion about our origins.

The denomination, organized in 1860 is one outgrowth of the Advent Awakening of the mid-19th century led by William Miller who was used of God to awaken the Christian church to the reality of the nearness of the Second Coming of Christ.

The belief in the imminent return of Christ was so compelling that Miller traveled hundreds of miles under less than ideal

circumstances to get the message out to as many as possible, in the shortest time possible, wherever possible, in every way possible. In a 5 year span from the mid-1830's, it is estimated that Miller preached more than 500 sermons on the Second Coming of Christ. This extensive schedule was accomplished without the means of travel available to us today. Lectures and Bible Conferences were set up in public halls and buildings as well as in churches wherever possible. Hugh tents were also set up in public areas of towns where people gathered to hear the message. One tent seated 4,000 people.

Most of the Advent Christian churches in the Eastern Region can trace their origin to a time when William Miller preached in their town.

One conclusion that can be reached regarding the Adventual Awakening of the mid-19th century, in spite of errors and misunderstandings, was to confirm the effectiveness of eschatological preaching and the importance of a theology of hope!

When God moves through a people passionately committed to a relevant Biblical truth under the anointing of the Holy Spirit, a great spiritual harvest is gathered for the Kingdom.

Here we are 150 years removed from those exciting days, devoid of the passion and the power, wondering what has gone wrong. Where did we lose it? What is our mission in these closing days of time?

The Regional Board of Directors have taken their leadership responsibilities seriously and undertaken a study to sharpen our focus and give us a vision for the future. I commend them for that.

Whatever is decided about the role of the Region in the future, of one thing we can be certain, the Advent Christian church was raised up with a message for the end-times which is more

relevant today that when it was first preached. We are living NOW in the last days. Developments on the world scene have an astounding correspondence to Bible prophecies. People are lost and the day of His appearing is rapidly approaching.

If we truly believe that God raised this denomination up for a purpose, the time has come to rediscover that purpose, define the obstacles that hinder us from achieving that purpose, assess our resources, and develop a strategy to most effectively utilize those resources in achieving God's purpose for us in these last days of time.

The issue is not where did we come from, as interesting as that may be, but what are we doing today with what God has placed in our hands to do His work in the world for His glory!

The Eastern Regional Association Today.

The Eastern Regional Association is one denominational organization that was raised up more than 50 years ago as an agency to help advance God's purpose among Advent Christians in these last days.

Most people don't really understand what the Eastern Regional Association is or does. Opinions vary from a powerful organizational entity of denominational life to a questionable organization of denominational life with little or no value to the denomination.

Part of the problem is one of perception. Much of the ministry of the Eastern Region is low profile, consisting of counseling sessions with pastors and/or churches the nature of which is unpublicized. This can leave some with a question concerning the validity of the Region.

The fact-of-the-matter is, the Region is here and may have a more important role in the life of our denomination than most people realize.

The Eastern Region is an integral part of the Advent Christian denomination and while it is a semi-independent organizational structure, its past, present, and future is a vital part of the denomination.

Those of us gathered here today, are the leadership team of the Eastern Region. It is important for us to understand who we are as an organization before we can decide what our role is, if any, in the future of our denomination!

The Eastern Regional Association is made up of Advent Christian churches, Conferences of churches, and para-church ministries located in New England, New York, and the provinces of Ontario, Quebec, New Brunswick, and Nova Scotia, Canada.

The Region is one of five Regional organizations of the Advent Christian denomination headquartered in Charlotte, NC.

The primary function of the Region is to oversee the state of affairs among Advent Christian Churches in the Region and to otherwise provide counsel and leadership that will contribute to a healthy and growing witness for Christ in these last days of time.

This ministry of oversight and care is carried out through the Office of the Regional Superintendent who is the Chief Administrative Officer of the Region. For many, the office of Regional Superintendent is the face of the Region. Everything the Region is and does, flows out of his office. He is charged with the management of the total ministry of the Region. One might think that given his position, he could accomplish more and solve all the problems. The fact is, he can't change a great deal. He can't order anything or dictate anything. His most important contribution is to encourage, facilitate, advocate, and educate. Historically, as a denomination, we have never respected spiritual authority. Whatever authority the Superintendent exercises has to be earned through a ministry of

respect and care for others. The lack of constitutional authority limits the ministry effectiveness of the Superintendent.

Organizational Givens

Several factors govern how the ministry of the Region is received, utilized, and advanced.

- 1. The Regional Board of Directors is the governing body of the Eastern Regional Association and is made up of three executive officers who are elected by the delegate body of the Association, along with the presidents of member Conferences and the Eastern Regional Representative to the Advent Christian General Conference. The primary function of the Board of Directors is to employ the Regional Superintendent, set policy, and approve direction for the Superintendent in administering the Regional program.**
- 2. Conferences are an integral part of the Regional structure and serve a valid purpose in providing fellowship and encouragement to member churches and pastors.**
- 3. Churches of the Region are essentially autonomous entities in respect to our system of governance. However, each church by virtue of its affiliation with a member Conference of the Region voluntarily surrenders a portion of that autonomy for the mutual benefit of itself and the other churches with which it is affiliated.**

This is especially true in the matter of credentialing workers, the calling or dismissing of a pastor, and the disciplining of same should that ever be necessary.

Churches look to the Regional Superintendent for counsel in several areas of their life and ministry. The spiritual health and vitality of the local church is a matter of utmost importance and interest to the Region in performing its role of oversight and care.

- 4. Pastors are primarily accountable to the local church which calls them and defines their level of ministry. However, most pastors are credentialed by the Eastern Regional Association and are therefore accountable to the Region in matters of personal conduct and character.**

The Eastern Region works closely with local Conferences in the matter of credentialing workers, providing pastor care, and exercising discipline.

The Regional Superintendent, by virtue of his office, counsels pastors in respect to their life and ministry. He is assisted in this task by Conference Ministerial Committees and others who may be employed as a Pastor-at-Large.

- 5. Finances for carrying out the extensive ministry of the Region are provided by member churches on an apportionment basis. Church apportionments have been a staple of the Region almost since its inception. Churches also fund the work of local Conferences as well as the National and Inter-national Ministries of the denomination.**

The work of the Region and the General Conference is linked in a system called United Ministries. At the 1992 Regional Convention, the delegate body voted to set the Regional Apportionment for local churches at 3% of a churches annual income from tithes and offerings.

An additional 7% is needed by the Advent Christian General Conference to fund its total ministry which includes Gospel outreach in more than 30 countries. A separate brochure explaining the Denominational System of Finance is available from the Regional Office.

Regional Organizational Philosophy

The Regional Organizational Philosophy has been developed after years of experience working with Conferences, auxiliary

ministries, local churches and pastors, and after extensive interaction with denominational leaders.

The thinking is based on a practical approach to resource the ministry needs of local churches. Some aspects of that philosophy include the following:

- 1. People are more important than programs. They are the most valuable resource in the work of the Kingdom.**
- 2. Pastors are called, equipped and empowered by the Lord to lead the ministry of His Church. Pastoring is a difficult matter in the hostile secular environment that defines life in the 21st century. These special servants of the Lord need the prayers, encouragement, and support of the Church and are encouraged to network with other pastors for accountability and encouragement.**
- 3. Local churches are the center of ministry life as taught in Scripture. Everything done on a Regional level should be done with a view toward helping the local church become everything Christ created it to be. The local church is the bedrock of Kingdom ministry.**
- 4. Nothing should be done for a local church that it can do for itself with better results.**
- 5. Local churches are encouraged to network with all levels of denominational life to take full advantage of resources that will enable them to be better equipped and mobilized for the work of ministry.**
- 6. Any resources or services developed for the local church should be developed in the most cost-effective manner possible while maximizing opportunities to the fullest.**

Coordination of ministries should be attempted on all levels to reduce duplication and overlap.

- 7. All organizational levels beyond the local church exist to help the local church achieve what it cannot achieve for itself in respect to its global mission.**
- 8. All efforts of pastors, churches, Conferences, Regional, and denominational offices are of little value without the blessing of God.**

Consequently, everything we do or seek to do must be bathed in prayer and directed by the Holy Spirit. Without the Lord our efforts are in vain. John 15:5.

Regional Ministry

Most Regional ministries available to the local church, to pastors, and auxiliary ministries are provided through the Office of the Regional Superintendent. This means that some churches will not benefit directly from the ministries on a regular basis due to the geography of the Region and the need to direct those ministries where they are most needed or requested. One person cannot begin to satisfy the interests and needs of all the churches and pastors in an area as large as the Eastern Region. I know of no other denomination that defines the task of its bishop or superintendent as extensively as that of the Eastern Region, and in the geographical scope of the Eastern Region.

The ministry of the Region is a multi-faceted ministry, requiring many hours and extensive travel. While I have tried to reduce my travel slightly over the past few years, it still amounts to approximately 40,000 miles driven a year as well as air travel whenever possible.

The ministry of the Superintendent is extensive and varied. The nature of the ministry in which he is involved requires him to be a generalist. If he concentrates too much on any one area, other important ministry functions suffer loss.

The Regional ministry can be summarized under the following categories:

Preaching.

I have been called upon to preach on a number of occasions in local churches of the Region as a pulpit supply or special speaker. This aspect of the ministry is by far the most enjoyable and rewarding as congregations respond to the preaching of the Word.

In addition to general preaching, I have had the occasion to preach the welcoming sermon for Sheffield Chapel in Sheffield, Massachusetts which official joined our denomination in November 2008. I also had the privilege of preaching the installation sermon for Chad Fernald in Dover, NH who was also ordained to the ministry of the Advent Christian Church. I preached the installation service for the Rev. Dr. Alvin McComiskey at Bear Point, Nova Scotia, Canada.

In June of this year I preached the occasional sermon for the annual Heritage Sunday at the William Miller Chapel in Lo Hampton, NY.

One highlight of the year was the honor bestowed on me to preach the funeral sermon for our beloved brother, Earl Waterman who at the age of 96 fell asleep in Jesus awaiting the trumpet call of God and the resurrection to eternal life at the glorious second coming of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

I have also had the privilege of speaking and representing the Region at the 150th anniversary celebration of the Calvary Advent Christian Church in Bristol, Connecticut, and the 100th anniversary celebration of the Vernon, Vermont Advent Christian Church.

I am available to preach in local churches as a pulpit supply or for special occasions either for one service or for a series of meetings. I am currently working on some material that has

special application to the times in which we live and expect to have that material ready for publication and for use in special services and Conference gatherings sometime before the end of next year. I am also available to meet with a church or a pastor as may be needed or requested.

Pastoral Transition.

Another significant area of ministry is that of pastoral transition. When I assumed this position in 1980, pastors transitioned on average every 3-5 years. That statistic has changed dramatically over the past few decades as pastors are now staying with a church for a considerably longer period of time.

One issue we need to be aware of over the next decade or so is the number of pastors who will reach retirement age (whatever that is) and decide to leave the ministry. This has the potential of creating a crisis of leadership if we do not find a way to raise up more pastors who are qualified spiritually, academically, socially, and emotionally to successfully pastor a church.

In the meantime, I have met with or been in communication with several potential pastoral candidates from outside our fellowship who have inquired about the possibility of pastoring an Advent Christian Church. One such inquiry came from a man who had excellent qualifications except when I asked him why he wanted to become an Advent Christian pastor he indicated he wanted to return to his roots. That's nice. If every ordained minister who has roots in the Advent Christian denomination were to return, we would be flooded with pastors. When I inquired about this man's compatibility theologically, he indicated that he did not hold to our distinctive Biblical teachings anymore.

I have met with several church search committees during the past year and was able to help in most of those situations. At present, there are only a handful of Advent Christian churches seeking pastoral leadership, none of which are capable of sustaining a full time pastor.

**Pulpits that have been filled since we last gathered are: (Intro's)
Dover, NH., where the Rev. Chad Fernald became the pastor.
Beals, Me., where Josh Blackstone became the pastor.
Bristol, Ct., where the Rev. Bryce Whiting became the pastor.
Bear Point, Nova Scotia, where the Rev. Dr. Alvin McComiskey
became the pastor, and
Melrose, Mass., where Andrew Rice became the pastor.**

One other development I want to report on is the Providence International Advent Christian Church of Providence, RI. This church was planted several years ago by the Rev. Amos Gbaa and has had an unsteady life over this span of time. Recently, Amos found it necessary for personal reasons to move to Tennessee where he and Mary have taken up residence. Amos had groomed his son Joshua to take over the work but due to personal reasons, Joshua was unable to continue with the work and moved with his wife and family to Tennessee last month.

The Conference Board and Oversight committee prayerfully discussed the future of this work which had declined to just a few people. The decision was made to bring in a man who had been a part of the work previously and who had expressed interest in serving the church. The oversight committee met with him and felt God's leading to appoint him to the leadership position of the church.

The church has been renamed the Providence Advent Christian Church and continues to minister to the Liberian community as well as other ethnicities. The Conference and oversight committee are confident the new leadership will be able to lead the church forward in the days ahead. I have personally been close to these developments and provided counsel both to the Conference Board and to the oversight committee.

Churches which have been supporting this work are encouraged to continue that support which is needed as a new strategy for growth is in place. Already, the numbers have increased as some who had left the work have returned under the new leadership. Financial support for this work should be sent to the Conference treasurer, Kevin Crouse as was previously done.

Credentials

Among the most significant ministries of the Region is the credentialing program which was initiated in 1999 at the request of and in consultation with the Conferences of the Region. This program has been fine tuned over the years and is the best program for credentialing ministers in the entire denomination.

Our Manual of Ministerial Office and Procedure establishes the standards for granting ordination and commissioning of ministers in the Region for all participating Conferences. The program has worked well and we enjoy a fine working relationship with the Conferences we service.

During the past year, Doug Holmes was ordained to the Christian ministry in Lenox, Mass., and Chad Fernald was received into fellowship as an ordained minister. Commissioned as ministers of the Gospel were Ed Cilley in Rochester, NH, Jim Bisgrove in Westfield, Mass., Derek Irvine, a recent graduate of Gordon Conwell Theological Seminary in Melrose, Mass. and Andrew Rice, also recently graduated from Gordon Conwell Theological Seminary in Melrose, Mass..

We have sensed a need for an additional ministerial credential that could provide recognition for ministerial service to some who are called but who do not fully meet the qualifications of the ordained or commissioned minister credential.

We will be working with Conferences in the coming months to consider the reinstatement of the Christian Workers credential or similar credential, which could be processed on the Conference level if desired. Anyone seeking such a credential should be able to demonstrate a need for the credential, be a member in good standing of an Advent Christian Church, be recommended by a pastor or elder board of a local Advent Christian Church, demonstrate maturity of faith, and complete at least five courses of the LAMP program or a suitable equivalent.

Pastor Care

One of the major areas of Regional involvement is that of Pastor Care. Pastor Care is a shared responsibility with the local church, with Conferences, with ACGC and the Region. Each has a role to play.

The Region takes its responsibility seriously although there are never enough resources or time to adequately meet the need.

I have personally spent many hours meeting with pastors one-on-one or in groups to provide encouragement or counsel as needed. Many pastors look to my office for counsel. They don't always like what I share but I believe I have been supportive and helpful in discerning the will of the Lord. God has blessed this ministry and provided the discernment necessary to effectively serve this need.

In addition to my personal involvement, I have employed the services of Bryce Whiting during this past year as a Pastor-at-large. Bryce has been well received and has done an outstanding job with this ministry of pastor care. I want to take this opportunity to also thank the Maranatha Conference, the Heritage Conference, and the New Life Conference for their valued financial support of this ministry. Without their support, the ministry of Pastor-at-Large would not be possible.

One thing we did this past year that proved to be a blessing to all who participated was to host the Advent Christian students at Gordon Conwell Theological Seminary at the Regional residence for a meal and a time of fellowship.

One other matter I want to address in this section on Pastor Care is what I call the problem of pastoral focus. The ministry too often becomes all-consuming causing the pastor to lose focus on the family.

Pastors often are sucked into the 24-7 schedule leaving little time for spouse and family. Churches don't always recognize how damaging this can be to relations at home. When a pastor tries to

honor the commitment to his spouse and family by carving out quality time for them, he is often criticized by members of the church for not spending enough time in ministry. Get off it. You are doing your pastor a disservice and the work of the Kingdom a disservice by demanding he give all his time and attention to you. What good is it if he spends his time 24-7 on his ministry and his family life falls apart. We've seen too much of that over the years.

Our denomination partners with a group known as Galatians 6:6 Retreats whose purpose is to strengthen pastoral families. Several denominational pastors and wife have attended these retreats with very positive results. You will find a brochure in your delegate packets describing this ministry. Dr. Sam Warren of the denominational office of Nurture is here at our Convention this year and Sam is the man who can answer your questions. I strongly encourage every church in the Region to send your pastor and spouse to one of these retreats. This is Pastor Appreciation month and one way to show you care is to make it possible for your pastor and wife to attend one of these retreats.

Leadership Training

One ministry of the Region that has proven highly successful over the years is the ministry of leadership training.

The Lay Pastor Training Program was instituted in 1999 out of a concern for training men whom God had called to positions of leadership in the local church who were not able to go to Bible College or Seminary due to life circumstances.

During the 10 years that we have run this program, more than 500 persons have been involved in the courses of study we offered. These courses were of high academic quality often being taught by men who held advanced educational degrees. I believe the purpose of professional enrichment and ministry preparation was well served.

The program has been adjusted from time to time to improve its delivery and substance. I believe the time has come for an additional adjustment.

In 2010, we plan to partner with the Antioch School to provide an opportunity for anyone interested to secure academic credit towards a degree. This will be done on an experimental basis in 2010 after which a decision will be made about the future of the program. I understand this adjustment isn't for everyone but it will provide a proven curriculum and course of study for anyone seeking to become better prepared for ministry.

This afternoon at 4:15, the details of this partnership will be presented in a special Pastor's Connect Forum with representatives of the Antioch School sharing how it will work and being available to answer questions. I'm asking and requesting that all pastors and church leaders be present for this informational presentation.

I'm hoping to keep the professional enrichment dimension of LAMP in place for those whose interests and needs are not met by the Antioch School partnership. Much of this is in development at this point in time.

Administration

The Superintendent is the Chief Administrative Officer of the Region and as such is involved in the day to day administration of the Region. This includes phone calls, emails, snail mailings, and something called FaceBook. Can you believe it, I'm on FaceBook! Can't say I visit there very often but I have an identity or whatever you call it. Last time I checked, I had 127 friends, wow! Didn't realize that; an additional 63 unconfirmed Friend requests, 38 friend suggestions, and 96 other requests. Does that tell you anything about my FaceBook activity? I shouldn't minimize this social gathering place. I believe it can be and is being used of God to help advance His Kingdom.

One major administrative activity is the planning and management of the annual Regional Convention. Enough said, you've heard it all before.

Also included in the administrative duties of the Superintendent is the preparation of church resources, the planning of special Regional ministries, and the management of Regional finances.

Regional Finances

Speaking of Regional finances, I am pleased to report that the financial condition of the Region is stable. We aren't overstocked with money wondering how to spend it, and neither are we struggling to make ends meet. There are always things you would like to do if the funds were there but we are grateful for what we are able to do with the funds we have.

God has blessed us with a strong response to our apportionment system which is the life-blood of the Region. I want to take this opportunity to thank the churches that have faithfully supported the work of the Region by designating 3% of their income from tithes and offerings as their means of support. Without this income, it would be virtually impossible to sustain our Regional ministry at the current level.

The 3% churches send directly to the Region makes up most of the 30% due the Region each month from ACGC. I want to clear up one commonly held misunderstanding. The Region does not receive 30% of all income going to ACGC from the Region in addition to what it receives as apportionment income. The apportionment income we receive directly from our churches is reported monthly to ACGC and in most cases is equal to or exceeds the amount we would otherwise be entitled to meaning we seldom receive any dollars from ACGC. So far in 2009, we have received just one payment totaling about \$4,000.

In fact, churches who do not pay their apportionment directly to the Region contribute very little in actual dollars to the support

of the Region. If anyone wants to talk to me about this later, I would be happy to do so.

The Board of Directors decided to employ a CPA to audit our books for the last fiscal year of the Association at considerable expense. This 'audit' review was far beyond anything ever required in the past. The CPA stated, "I am not aware of any material modifications that should be made to the financial statements to be in conformity with the cash basis of accounting".

One other area I want to report on in the financial arena is the 2009 annual Penny Crusade for Missions. The denominational Penny Crusade for Missions was actually started in the Eastern Region more than 50 years ago at Seabrook, NH, and is a vital component of the ACGC United Ministries budget.

Traditionally, the Eastern Region is one of the largest contributors to world missions and our churches are to be commended for this. Missions is a divine injunction and we have done a relatively good job supporting missions and participating in missions by sending teams of workers from local churches to various fields.

However, in 2009, our support of the denominational Penny Crusade for Missions has dropped considerably from previous years. In 2008 our actual giving to Penny Crusade at a corresponding date was \$35,000 higher than in 2009. There may be good reasons for this but in reviewing the record of giving and the churches who have participated, it doesn't appear to be all related to the economy. We need to do better!

If your church is holding Penny Crusade money for any reason, it is imperative to send it in as soon as possible. Our missions people are being severely impacted in their ability to carry on the work by the loss of Penny Crusade revenue.

If your church decided not to participate this year, for whatever reason, please reconsider and do something to address this need.

Another matter of interest to our constituents is the status of the two major funds the Region accepted from the Somerville, Massachusetts church in 2002 when it closed and merged with Faith Evangelical Church of Melrose.

The Somerville Church Endowment Fund and the Edwin K. Gedney Seminary Fund were transferred to the Eastern Regional Association to be managed by the Association in accordance with a Memorandum of Understanding. During the time we have managed these funds we have exercised great care and the funds have shown considerable growth.

The Regional Board of Directors voted last year to transfer the Edwin K. Gedney Seminary Fund to Berkshire Christian College.

The Region has since totally divested itself of this Fund, the purpose of which is the support of the Berkshire Professor of Advent Christian Studies Chair at Gordon Conwell Theological Seminary for which Berkshire Christian College is responsible.

The other Fund, the Somerville Church Endowment Fund is still held and managed by the Regional office.

The primary purpose of the Somerville Church Endowment Fund is to pay the annual rental costs from interest earned for the Somerville Suite at Meetinghouse Village in Kittery, Maine. Secondly, an annual contribution is made to the Harry Harris Youth Fund at Faith Evangelical Church in Melrose, Ma.. These disbursements are required by the management agreement.

It should be noted that I, as Superintendent, am responsible constitutionally for managing the finances of the Region but I do not keep the books or normally sign the checks. The books are kept by a very capable independent retired CPA who reports to

me on the status of our finances. I in turn, report to the Board of Directors.

One other matter I want to speak to has to do with the tax-exempt status of local churches who claim their exemption under the umbrella of ACGC.

Two weeks ago, I was informed of a ruling by the IRS that everyone needs to be aware of. The day when the IRS winked at non-compliant charities, especially churches is over.

The IRS has informed ACGC that churches cannot be included under the denominational 501(C)(3) group exemption number unless they have their own Employer ID Number (EIN, formerly 'Federal ID').

ACGC keeps a record of church EIN's some of which are inaccurate, so as to notify IRS of which churches are to be included under the denominational umbrella. It is important to be in touch with Dawn Rutan at our denominational office for further information.

If a church happens to have its own 501(C)(3) exemption, it is important to send a copy of those papers to ACGC so they will not include your church in the group exemption.

Canadian Association

One of the administrative matters I have been involved with over the past year or two is the possible creation of a Canadian Association of Advent Christian churches. Our sister churches in Canada are mostly isolates belonging to different Conferences in the States, with the exception of the Nova Scotia Conference.

In discussion with our Canadian brothers and sisters it seemed expedient that an independent Association of Canadian churches be formed that would allow these churches to have a common

association with other Canadian churches with whom they had more in common.

After extensive research done by the president of the Nova Scotia Conference, it appears that such an Association is beyond the grasp of the Region or our Canadian churches. The legal hoops that would be necessary to jump through and the projected costs make it unlikely the idea will come to fruition. If ACGC was a registered denomination in Canada the matter would be considerably less demanding as I understand it.

Consequently, I will be proposing to the Nova Scotia Conference, which already has recognition in Canada, that they expand their borders to include other Regional Advent Christian churches in Canada and redefine their purpose which could have the same effect as a separate Association of Advent Christians Churches.

An annual summit of all Canadian pastors and churches could be held at a mutually convenient location with expenses for such a gathering being borne in part by the Canadian Church Growth and Assistance Fund. Such a summit would allow these brothers and sisters to discuss matters of mutual interest. Canada is not the United States and there are issues and matters that concern these brothers and sisters that we here in the States are not aware of.

Planting of new churches and revitalization strategies are important to the future of our Canadian work. Consequently, I have proposed to the Regional Board of Directors that the ownership of the Canadian Church Growth and Assistance Fund, currently in the name of the Eastern Region be turned over to the Nova Scotia Conference to manage for the mutual benefit of all Canadian churches who meet the requirements and guidelines.

Denominational

Beyond the ministries available to the local church, the Regional Superintendent is an important resource and counselor to local

Conferences and to the Advent Christian General Conference with whom he partners in advancing the work of the Kingdom. Most Conferences recognize his expertise, his experience and wisdom gained over an extended period and seek out his counsel on important decisions they are called upon to make.

I have attended most of the annual Conference meetings which gives me an opportunity to learn what the Conferences are thinking and also to touch base with pastors and lay leaders.

This past year I have attended two separate summits of the five Regional Superintendents at our denominational offices in Charlotte. These summits are important as we have an opportunity to share ideas and discuss matters that impact our total denominational life.

These summits are chaired by our denominational Executive Director, Ron Thomas and also attended by the Director of Nurture for the denomination, Sam Warren.

One ministry growing out of these summits is the LEAD team experience initiate on the West Coast and now adopted in all 5 Regions. LEAD is an acronym standing for LEARN, EDUCATE, ACHIEVE, AND DREAM. We are encouraging the support of the LEAD team concept, which is an intentional in-depth pastor-care ministry.

Additionally, at the last summit we discussed the need for a concerted ministry of church planting. I have asked the Board of Directors to appoint a Regional Commission on Church Planting that will be in place to coordinate our denominational efforts along these lines. Church planting is not new to the Eastern Region. This Region was the first to employ a Director of Church Planting in 1978 which was short lived due to the untimely death of Dr. Edwin K. Gedney who served as Director. He traveled the Region in his brief tenure creating an atmosphere for Church Planting that resulted in several new church plants. He was followed in turn by a full-time director, Richard DuBois and subsequently by Roy Ames.

The time has come to gear up our church planting efforts as the day of His appearing is drawing near. Church Planting is not a Regional responsibility alone. Conferences and local churches must commit to this method of expanding the Kingdom of God and join forces with all parties who share the vision to get the job done. The Region understands the importance of church planting and stands ready to engage in a cooperative effort that will result in new churches and additions to the Kingdom of God. As stated earlier, I have recommended to the Regional Board of Directors that a Commission on Church Planting be appointed and charged with development of a philosophy of church planting, creation of some goals and a strategy to implement those goals.

I would like to see us launch a 10 year plan in 2010 that will result in 20 new Advent Christian churches by 2020. That should be a goal we could achieve fairly easily. Two new churches a year for 10 years. We have some churches that could plant two or three churches during that time frame on their own. I would really like to see us stretch our faith and seek to plant enough churches by 2020 as to give us 150 Advent Christian churches in the Region by 2020 in celebration of the 150th anniversary of the denomination in 2010. Together, great things can happen for His glory.

Some of the ministries I have reported on are shared with local Conferences and the Advent Christian General Conference. There is a need to focus on which ministries can best be delivered on which level of denominational life so as to avoid competition, duplication, and waste of resources.

A Challenged Future

As we look to the future, we must do so with the awareness that any strategy we employ for advancing the work of the Kingdom through the Advent Christian Church will be met with significant challenges.

Some of these challenges include the following:

▶ **Trivialization of the Christian Church.**

The Christian Church, once respected and revered by society has experienced a loss of respect in this generation. All signs point to a continued devaluing of the Church.

▶ **Secularization of Society.**

The loss of respect for the Christian Church in this generation can be traced to the secularization of society which began in earnest in the 1960s. This secularization has been growing unabated in the Church to the extent that most adults under 35 have nothing to do with the Church and see no value in its being. Even people over 35 have shown less interest in things spiritual.

This attitude has reached a point in Britain where the London-based National Secular Society has begun issuing a “certificate of de-baptism.” Former church members who were baptized as infants have downloaded the mock certificate from the NSS website to “*reject baptism’s creeds and other such superstitions.*” More than 100,000 people have downloaded this document since it went on-line 5 years ago, and traffic has picked up to about 1,000 downloads per week. This trend is reflected in the mass exodus of members from main-line denominational churches here in North America. The Advent Christian denomination is not exempt from this scenario.

A recent report by the Barna Group identified the northeastern section of the country (that’s the Eastern

Region) as the least religious segment of the countries population. Doing church in this part of the country is more difficult than anywhere else. If a similar study were to be done in Canada, the results would probably look very similar.

The implications of the secularization of society are profound for the Advent Christian Church in the future.

► New Testament Church Model.

For generations, pastors and church leaders have wanted to model their ministries after the New Testament Church. Over the generations of time, traditions and practices have been adopted that have moved the Church to some degree away from what the 1st century church looked like. This isn't necessarily bad. Some of it is inevitable and may even be advantageous to fulfilling the Church's Biblical calling. However, when extreme reactions occur in response to the perceived inroads of the culture on the church, the effects can be devastating.

Renowned Christian researcher, George Barna, in *Pagan Christianity*, a book he co-authored with Frank Viola, argues that the 21st century Christian Church has been corrupted and compromised by the culture in which it ministers. He calls for all Christians to leave their traditional church and start meeting in small groups or house churches. I know of at least one church here in the Eastern Region that has already been impacted to the extent that nearly half of the congregation have taken their memberships and left the church influenced by Barna's philosophy. Some of these people have been in that church more than 50 years and are 2nd or 3rd generation families.

► Projected Evangelical Collapse.

Building on everything already stated we are sobered by the understanding that evangelical Christianity as we know it may have seen its best days. Michael Spencer, writing in *The Christian Science Monitor*, March 10, 2009 states, “An anti-Christian chapter in western history is about to begin. We are on the verge – within 10 years – of a major collapse of evangelical Christianity. This breakdown will follow the deterioration of the mainline Protestant world and it will fundamentally alter the religious and cultural environment in the West.”

It is my opinion that the dramatic shift in political philosophy recently inaugurated in the United States, new details of which are emerging daily, will serve as a catalyst to the diminishing influence of evangelical Christianity in the West. This may be the most significant development on the world stage in these closing days of time.

Challenges Facing the Advent Christian denomination.

Closer to home, Advent Christians have their own set of challenges to deal with if we as a denomination are going to have a dynamic witness for Christ in the years ahead.

► The Challenge Posed by the Culture

For one thing, we must recognize that we are not immune from what is going on in the world around us. We too face the problem of cultural conditioning. Too often the world dictates our values, shapes our worldview, and defines our character. The Bible calls upon Christians to live differently from the world. 2 Cor 6:14-17

14 Don't be teamed with those who do not love the Lord, for what do the people of God have in common with the people of sin? How can light live with darkness? 15 And what harmony can there be between Christ and the devil? How can a Christian be a partner with one who doesn't believe? 16 And what union can there be between God's temple and idols? For you are God's

temple, the home of the living God, and God has said of you, "I will live in them and walk among them, and I will be their God and they shall be my people." 17 That is why the Lord has said, "Leave them; separate yourselves from them; don't touch their filthy things. TLB

The Book of Titus describes Christian character as a counter to modern culture. Titus 2:11-15. Christians are called upon to live godly in this present age.

The problem is we have allowed the world to squeeze us into its mold. Too often there isn't any distinguishing characteristic between the Christians life style and that of his unbelieving neighbor.

We are living in an age when culture defines success. This is the era of the Mega Church. People are drawn to large churches with big buildings, big programs and multi-staffs. The church that has the best show in town will likely draw the most people. People see ministries on TV and equate them with success. It is a matter of cultural conditioning. We are a denomination of small churches and will never impress anyone with what we have to offer in comparison with the Mega Church. Can we handle this? Can we do anything about it? Should we?

The Challenge of Church Mission

In respect to the local church, maybe the biggest challenge facing the Region, or the Conference, or ACGC for that matter, is understanding what the mission of the local church is and knowing how best to come along side of the local church to assist in fulfilling that mission.

One principal we must live by as a denomination is that every level of denominational life exists to help the local church fulfill its God-ordained mission.

Over the history of the Christian Church, God has raised up denominational structures and auxiliary ministries to help the

local church become everything the Lord created it to be. The local church is the bedrock of Kingdom ministry as God's chosen agency of world evangelism.

The early Church was a caring community of believers. They exercised spiritual gifts and gave God the glory in all things. They were mission minded, commissioning workers to take the Gospel to other cities and towns. They were committed to spiritual growth and doing Kingdom work. They exercised discipline over members when needed.

This brings us to today. What are God's expectations for His Church in the 21st century? What has changed or should change? How does the 21st century Advent Christian church, measure up to God's stated purposes for His church?

As I have studied Scripture over the years in respect to the purpose of the church, there are four major categories that sum up what the church is called to be and do in the world. They are;

- 1. Gather in worship.**
- 2. Go and make disciples.**
- 3. Bear witness to the saving power and grace of our Lord.**
- 4. Take the Gospel to the ends of the earth.**

We would do well to seriously evaluate how effective we are in these important areas.

For the most part we do worship well. Diverse, but well. We tend to help spread the gospel to the ends of the earth. Historically we have done well with this divine imperative. Where I sense we are weak is in the area of making disciples and sharing our faith. This is the Great Commission, the one thing Jesus told us to do, and also the one that has the most direct impact on local church growth. You don't need a degree in rocket science to figure this out.

The Challenge of a Unifying Vision

Another challenge we face as a denomination is what I call the challenge of a unifying purpose or vision. Do we know why we exist as a people? Do we have a unifying passionate commitment to a purpose which defines our reason for being and becomes our rallying cry?

The Challenge of Pastoral Training

Another challenge the Region faces is the challenge of pastoral training.

Ever since Berkshire Christian College suspended campus operations in 1987, the denomination has been without a full term Advent Christian ministerial training base. Some alternative means for training are available but at best we are turning out 3-4 potential pastors annually. Given the current state of affairs, they may be all we need to fill vacancies arising from retirement or relocation. We need more than pastoral replacements, however. We need to address the matter of training church planters.

Another factor is that some churches are growing their own pastoral replacements which may be an answer for the future but this raises questions about the pastor's academic qualifications and his ability to secure credentials.

As a denomination, if we see ourselves as a viable Kingdom partner in the years ahead, the matter of pastoral training should be high on our agenda.

The Challenge of Structure

Another challenge we face is one of structure. If the Region is to be an active, effective structure assisting the local church in partnership with other levels of denominational life, how best should the Region be organized to maximize its effectiveness?

The Board of Directors is the governing Board of the Region. A few years ago, the Board was reconstituted with the idea of

strengthening our partnership with local Conferences by including Conference presidents on the Board by virtue of office. The jury is still out on this. Conference presidents don't usually stay in office for an extended period leaving the Board susceptible to significant turnover. It is difficult for a Board to effectively oversee the work of the Region with new people coming on board every few years, often with a limited knowledge of the Region and limited experience.

It might be time to re-evaluate this decision and reconstitute the Board to retain Conference representation while addressing the matter of Board stability.

One way to do this would be to have the four largest Conferences select a nominee who would be elected to the Board by the delegate body for a five year staggered term. This person would be added to each Conference Board consistent with his term on the Regional Board, which would provide continuity between the Conference and the Region.

There would be a fifth at-large person elected under the same format that would allow the extremities of the Region to be represented.

In addition to this, a Leadership Advisory Council could be established consisting of the Regional Superintendent, the Conference Presidents, and Conference Board representatives who would meet annual in a retreat setting to set goals and make plans for a cooperative ministry across the Region. The denominational Director of the Department of Nurture could also be included to strengthen the partnership in ministry. To me, this idea may be the most exciting development we will have considered in many years. Think of what might happen if we could all sit down together on level ground and prayerfully seek the Lord to direct us in cooperative efforts to build His Kingdom!

Details of this arrangement could be worked out quite easily.

The Challenge of Attrition

Another challenge we face relates to the decline in churches that has characterized our history over the past 100 years. This problem is not unique to our denomination. People today are not interested in things spiritual. Two days ago, the Canadian National Post reported that Canadian churches mirror their N. American counterparts' dwindling attendance. A pastor in the French sector of Ottawa made the observation that churches that once drew 400-500 people now attract about 40. People don't go to church like they used to.

Shrinking attendance closes the door of the church. One more light goes out and the darkness deepens.

Too many of our churches have closed their doors and several of those still on our roster of churches are fragile and struggling for survival.

We acknowledge that since the revival fires of the early days of the Advent Movement, we have hardly generated a spark.

We can say the problem is with our heritage and some could make a case for that. However, other groups with the same heritage have actually thrived over the same time frame. You could say it is our message of Life Only In Christ or Conditional Immortality as some have suggested but that's a cop-out. You could say it is our leadership but that's to say the men and women who God raised up and gifted to lead this denomination over the past 100 years were only pretenders.

The problem isn't with our heritage, our message, or our leadership. Maybe the problem is with us. After all, we are the church, we are the denomination. It's a matter of commitment and vision!

There isn't any reason why any Advent Christian Church should be stagnate or in decline. We don't need to accept the status quo.

How do we address this problem?

Observations:

1. Growing or even maintaining a church in the Eastern Region is more difficult than anywhere else in N. America. Traditionally, the population in the northeastern United States and Canada is either predominantly Roman Catholic or avowedly non-religious.

2. Healthy churches with healthy pastoral leadership will likely meet any challenge they face and continue as a viable spiritual force in their community.

How do we identify the unhealthy churches and how do we diagnose what ails them? Once we have done that, how do we nurse them back to health if they are not good patients?

We have the tools in place but too often churches are not interested.

3. An aggressive church planting initiative could, if effective, infuse new life into the Region.

How do we go about it? Where will we find the church planters? How much money will it take and where will it come from?

These are questions we need to address and respond to if we are serious about making a difference for Christ in this day and age.

Conclusion

Perhaps the greatest challenge we face is a spiritual one. The channel through which the Holy Spirit moves is clogged with carnality, attitudinal plaque, and divisiveness. Carnality which is another term for worldliness, is not only a problem, it is a sin. A bad attitude is a symptom of a spiritual problem. Phil. 2:1-5. We sometimes demonstrate spiritual immaturity by our attitude. Too often we look at things with a critical eye more interested in finding something to complain about than to pray about. If you change the way you look at things, the things you look at will change. The Bible speaks to the matter of divisiveness as a serious sin compromising relations among believers and

hindering the work of the Kingdom. We need to extend forgiveness as we have experience it from Christ. True forgiveness is never extending with conditions attached.

If we want to experience the blessing of God we need to deal with the matters that block the flow of that blessing.

God wants to bless us. When God decides to move through a people passionately committed to a relevant Biblical truth under the anointing of the Holy Spirit, a great spiritual harvest is gathered for the Kingdom.

God is greater than any challenge we will ever face or any obstacle that may confront us.

As I stated in the outset of this report, I passionately believe that God raised up the Advent Christian denomination as a voice for the end-times to announce the day of the Lord and call people to repentance and acceptance of Jesus Christ in order that His eternal purpose of a people who will live in fellowship with Him in His Kingdom Paradise, for His glory forever, might be realized.

As Advent Christians we have a divinely appointed mission. Our forefathers demonstrated the effectiveness of eschatological preaching and a theology of hope.

We HAVE the message! What greater message is needed by a world adrift on a sea of hopelessness than the message of Jesus; crucified for our sins, raised victorious over death, and coming again in power and glory to establish His eternal kingdom of righteousness and peace on the earth made new? We HAVE the message!

We also HAVE the power! On the day He ascended into heaven, Jesus told His disciples, Acts 1:8 "You will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth." NIV.

The power to which Jesus referred is the same power that raised Jesus from the dead. Listen to how the apostle Paul put it to the church at Ephesus, Eph 1:18-23 “I pray also that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which he has called you, the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints, 19 and his incomparably great power for us who believe. That power is like the working of his mighty strength, 20 which he exerted in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly realms, 21 far above all rule and authority, power and dominion, and every title that can be given, not only in the present age but also in the one to come. 22 And God placed all things under his feet and appointed him to be head over everything for the church, 23 which is his body, the fullness of him who fills everything in every way.

We have the message and we have the power! The question is, do we have the commitment and the vision to make a difference for Christ in these closing days of time?

I call upon everyone in this place today to lay aside the trivial issues that cause for division and dissention. It is time to come together under the anointing of the Holy Spirit and with His direction go forth to accomplish His purposes, for His glory while it is day. The apostle Paul wrote this message of urgency to the church at Rome in the 1st century.

Romans 13:8-14. 8 “Let no debt remain outstanding, except the continuing debt to love one another, for he who loves his fellowman has fulfilled the law. 9 The commandments, are summed up in this one rule: "Love your neighbor as yourself." 10 Love does no harm to its neighbor. Therefore love is the fulfillment of the law.

11 And do this, understanding the present time. The hour has come for you to wake up from your slumber, because our salvation is nearer now than when we first believed. 12 The night is nearly over; the day is almost here”. NIV

Wake up, and rise up, Advent Christian church! Wake up and rise up pastors and lay leaders, rise up and be the people He created us to be for His glory!

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