

ACGC Report for 2017-2018

Last February after sharing the Strategic Plan for 2017-2020 with the Executive Council, I was excited, worn-out, and optimistic about what the future would be for our work here at ACGC. Over the last almost eight months I am truly amazed at how God has led us to this point. You will hear the reports for each of the critical areas how God has opened doors, closed doors said wait, and even led to frustration, but God has truly led. As we began this year our financial support was very low but that is normal for the beginning of the year. After the first quarter it was still not where it should be and that was concerning, especially if it was because the people we were sharing with did not agree with our goals and strategy. I want to thank the regional and conference leaders who gave me time to share this plan and to take questions at various conference meetings. I have to say that the responses from the people who attended the conferences were very favorable and even though there are some questions, it has been well received. I have to come to the point of accepting our current support is not a question of agreement but a reality of where we are as a denomination. We are down to 261 churches in North America that support districts, conferences, camps, regions, and ACGC above and beyond the local church. There is only so much water in the well to go around. I am convinced we have to move forward with these critical areas but we have to decide what ministries and expenses are critical to support the work we are called to do. As we approached the 2019 budget we did so with this in mind even more so that when we wrestled with the Strategic Plan. Each of you realize that our previous budget does not have much fat to easily cut. We have been doing that for the last decade. Currently we are doing our ministries with less staff but with more direction in specific areas but holding to on to past obligations. We are now down to making the tough decisions of being careful stewards with our resources, expenses, and capital to not just sustain operations but to move forward.

During our session with Lee Stephenson in May, we evaluated the history of our denomination and discovered some interesting things about how we are motivated. First, our best work happens when we follow Jesus, share His message and don't play it safe! Second, we are at our best when a sense of missional urgency is present! When we think back to our beginning days when we made major moves, we took some real faith steps. During the pre-denominational work people sacrificed to share the message of hope realizing that people needed to know about Jesus and His return. In our early years we stepped out and sent missionaries to the south to minister to freed slaves, and we reached out across the ocean sending missionaries to India, China, Philippines, and others. Through the years we have invested in developing Christian leaders and established two colleges dedicated to training pastors, missionaries, and leaders. We are at a point where these two historical characteristics must lead us to move forward with the mindset that we will succeed for the kingdom or go down investing in kingdom work for the greater family of God.

Over the last seven months, we have taken some bold steps that you will hear about in the reports of our directors and coordinators. These steps have been out of a real desire to further the progress of accomplishing our goals and vision of the Strategic Plan.

-One of the major steps has been to move our Director of Leadership Development into a part time position as Coordinator of Leadership Development and move him to Maine to open our

first field office. There, he will begin to develop relationships with emerging leaders already in training as well as those being led to participate in our training in the near future. As we were wrestling with how to get this done in Charlotte, God opened a discussion with a church that wanted to partner with us in leadership development and the church was willing to invest their resources not only in their local congregation but for the greater kingdom work of the Advent Christian church. Recently, we have established our new field office in Tustin, CA with Pastor Jack Mumford. As Matt and Jack work in this area they will be working on the curriculum for our three years of training, planning to have our first class in the fall of 2019.

-Another major step has been our consulting relationship with Converge which officially began in the early months 2018. This has been an exciting relationship that has challenged us to act aggressively in the area of church planting. I have been working most directly with Lee but we must recruit a coordinator to continue the relationship and get the most out of this consulting relationship for our future work. Who this will be is the greatest challenge at this point and I am praying for God to lead me to that person.

-Our work in the area of church health has continued to grow and Justin is working with numerous hats directing this ministry. He has a plan in place to train more coaches to spread the participation further around North America. Connected to this is a key component that has already touched a number of churches that are not large enough to participate in NCD and yet are seeking revitalization. We already have connections with a number of these situations but have met with frustration with churches literally giving up and closing or giving away their facilities to other groups. We must work together to approach and help before congregations get to this point.

-The major shift in international missions has been a challenge since the current relationships we have with established fields has not changed but our desire to focus on unreached people groups around the world opens a whole new area of commitment. Jeff has been working building partnership with groups we can work with to reach into these countries to share the message of Christ. We are praying for God to open the door to provide opportunities and funds to reach these people as well as missionaries who have the call to go into these areas of the world.

All of these critical areas are vital to the future work of not only the Advent Christian Church but to all Christian Churches and Christian organizations ministering in our ever changing world. I believe we must be willing to think outside of the current ministry box we have been living in and reach out to take steps to connect our ministries both within Advent Christian circles as well as the greater Evangelical community. We have begun to move away from our centralization of leadership here in Charlotte and spread out leadership across the country to lessen the appearance of being disconnected from the local churches to bring our connection with conferences and regions close to the people. Our world has changed the ability to connect through social media on a regular basis and has opened the doors to pull us together even in a broader geographical area. We need to look at our future and what it must look like to maximize the resources we have coming in as well as utilize the gifted people we have around the world.

This has been a difficult report to put into words because it will involve change and challenges to how things have always been done, but to move forward we have to face our current situation with realistic plans for tomorrow's ministry. We must pray together for God to guide us into the future, to strive to accomplish work that fulfills the Great Commission and the Great Commandment.

Respectfully Submitted,

Rev. Steve D. Lawson