



The Christian Reformed Church Classis Alberta North

Delegates to Classis Alberta North, March 3-4, 2009:

Please bring your own printed copy of the Agenda, this report, and financial reports which were attached to both the Agenda and this report.

Supplemental Reports for March 3-4, 2009 Meetings

Back to God Hour Ministries International

Classis Report – Gerrit J. Bomhof

“Try it again... for the first time”. That is what I would suggest for Back to God Ministries International (BTGMI). Many of us associate the Back to God Hour with the half hour preaching program that could be heard on a limited number of radio station across North America. Things have changed!

First of all, the name has changed. No longer is “Hour” to be included in the official name. This media ministry of the Christian Reformed Church is now known as Back to God Ministries International with the tag line: “Telling His Story Sharing His Love”. The change was made to better reflect the wide scope of the work, both in terms of ministry programming and geographical reach. Presently BTGMI broadcasts the gospel in nine languages - Arabic, Chinese, English, French, Indonesian, Japanese, Portuguese, Russian and Spanish to nearly 190 countries. At present the Board is considering a proposal to expand the outreach to northern India to the Hindi speaking world. This would be a ministry in collaboration and cooperation with Words of Hope (the media arm of the Reformed Church of America) and Good Books Educational Trust, an indigenous organization working in that part of the world.

Secondly I bring to your attention of the changing and expanding ministry of the English programming. Under the direction of Rev. Steven Koster, BTGMI is very intentionally entering the internet world. Recently we purchased from Gospel Communications their *Think Christian* portal (www.thinkchristian.net), encouraging people to look at culture from a Christian perspective. It is getting about a thousand hits per day.

Late last year a new weekly radio program was launched called **Under the Radar** (www.RadarRadio.net). Dave Trout hosts the hour long music program that introduces listeners to under-heard or undiscovered Christian artists.

BTGMI also produces **Kids corner** (www.KidsCorner.net) and has recently redesigned the characters and website in order to stay current for reaching today's children.

Walk the Way (www.WalkTheWay.net) is also a new radio and internet program that challenges younger, under-churched listeners to put their faith into action and think deeper about living out their beliefs.

The TODAY devotional continues to be widely distributed and well used. If you do your devotions through the computer you may connect to www.ThisIsToday.net for daily online devotionals.

If you or your church is involved with English as a second language courses you might want to check out www.SpotlightRadio.net.

Finally, the tried and true **Back to God Hour** radio program can be listened to at www.btgh.org/english_main.php. Presently a number of different pastors have been contracted to deliver the sermons.

It is a stated goal of BTGMI to partner with every CRC congregation, assisting them to create a link at their church's website with each of these aforementioned programs. David Trout or Jerod Clark would be only too happy to work with you. They can be reached at 800-879-6555.

I would be remiss if I did not pass on a real matter for prayer and action that was brought to our attention at our Board meeting of January 29,30. That concerns finances. Because of the sudden and precipitous drop in donations during this economic downturn, BTGMI is instituting cuts that amount to 15-20% of the budget. Thus far all personnel have been retained although salaries have been frozen and pension plans have been curtailed. The Board will again meet in March to finalize a budget for 2009/10 which Synod will be called to adopt at its meetings in June. Hopefully it will not be necessary to severely restrict the good work that is being done to present the gospel to so many places in the world and to so many different language groups. Back to God Ministries, as well as all the other agencies of our denomination appreciate congregations' prayers and their continuing support through financial contributions.

I am rather new in this position of Board member for the region that encompasses Classes Alberta North, Alberta South and Saskatchewan and Lake Superior (Canadian region). If you have any questions or suggestions feel free to contact me at gbomhof@firstcreddeer.org.

Classical Home Missions Committee

Church Planting - Creating a Way Forward

Purpose

The purpose of this document is to assist and encourage the Classical Home Missions Committee (CHMC) and Classis Alberta North to develop effective and sustainable church planting within its geographic region.

Introduction

In 2007 the CHMC provided Classis with a report entitled "Planting Seeds: Edmonton Area CRC Church Plant". Prepared and delivered by Trevor Vanderveen, the report provides a comprehensive look at church planting in Edmonton including a history of the CRC in Edmonton, as well as a sense of the 'religious' environment we find ourselves in. While this report limited itself to discussing church planting in the city of Edmonton, the rationale certainly applies more broadly. The continued growth of the region represented by Classis Alberta North both in

population and diversity represents a vast church planting opportunity. In the words of Jesus “the harvest is ripe”. This report will not provide further rationale for church planting as the need is evident. Instead this document will limit itself to introducing a possible new "Way Forward" for church planting in the region.

The report identifies current realities and outlines a number of considerations for bringing the Way Forward to life.

New Realities

If any plan is to be effective it is essential that CHMC, Classis and the churches recognize the changing nature of our society and culture. The extinction of spare time threatens volunteerism, true community is being replaced by virtual community on social networking sites, and two generations have now been raised on the premise of the inalienable right of the individual. And we are left to wonder why interest and participation in the institutional church is waning, especially among young adults. These trends transcend denominations and while many Christians may see them as an affront to scripture and their confessions, this is the reality in which the church finds itself, particularly in urban settings. Moreover, the prevalence and continuing development of technology will in all likelihood ensure that future society(s) and culture(s) continue on this road. If these are the realities that communities and churches find themselves in, there is little purpose in regret or lamentation; instead this report will introduce a potential response. We need to be mindful that the Way Forward is in no way an indictment of existing and established churches but is an effort to explore future and effective "Church Planting."

In his book “The Forgotten Ways” Alan Hirsch lays out one avenue on how churches can re-define themselves in post Christian cultures. CHMC acknowledges there are a variety of books and writing on this subject, and the matter warrants further study, but for the purpose of initiating an effort to move forward in the area of church planting we will introduce Hirsch as having good influence. Hirsch identifies five key areas for successfully engaging the culture and winning people to Christ. He refers to these as “*a powerful paradigm grid with which we will be able to assess our current understandings and experiences of church and mission.*” They are as follows (direct quotes, including Hirsch’s subheadings, are in *italics*.)

1. *The Missional / Incarnational Impulse* - Hirsch argues that we are past the days in which the church can expect that merely by being “Opened for business” un-churched and de-churched people will find their way in. To coin a phrase, “*if we build it they will NOT come*”. If the churches of Classis Alberta North are going to be effective in moving forward in the area of church planting and evangelistic outreach they need to find ways to bring the church to this developing culture(s). The goal is to *seed* and *embed* the gospel into different cultures and people groups. This may result in a diminished emphasis on the institution of the church (including buildings) and a much greater emphasis on multiple, *missional* movements and communities reaching increasingly divergent parts of our society. Whether established churches will explore or adopt this new approach is not the intent of this report.
2. *Leadership* - Hirsch explores whether the days of the classically trained professional pastor in every “church community” are numbered. He argues that the days of the “*apostolic leader*” may be approaching. According to Hirsch new churches and *missional communities* will increasingly be drawn to leaders who have the gifts and skills to lead effectively and the passion to creatively engage the work of reaching people for Jesus. Pastors will be assessed and rise to influence less on the basis of their degree or diploma than on their ability to fulfill the apostolic office. Future pastors will be raised up from the harvest and for the harvest by other apostolic leaders and will be “*discipled*” rather than “*educated*” into leadership. Education will still be relevant but *how* leaders are educated probably will change. The internet, distance learning, just-in-time training, self-education, mentoring and tent making may well be key aspects in the formation of a new generation of church leaders.
3. *Disciple Making* - New churches and *missional communities* will be increasingly concerned not with creating church members but with creating *Christian Disciples*. Such churches will not cater to “*consumer*” Christians who demand Christian goods and services, instead a *missional community* will require a high degree of commitment and sacrifice on the part of adherents. As such new churches may be smaller, slower growing and more intimate as they focus more intently on the practice of spiritual disciplines. The upside of this will be the emergence of more disciples who in turn are used by God to make other disciples.

4. *Organic Structures* - If Hirsch is accurate, future church governance and structures may need more flexibility as these emerging communities organize themselves for mission. Conformity to denominational structures may be a lower priority. The static model of church based primarily on congregation, programs, buildings and membership may fade and be replaced by a network of churches and communities that embrace what they believe to be the appropriate structure for developing and growing metabolically. In Hirsch words "*we need to develop a notion of Christian community, worship, mission, and organization which like the New Testament ecclesia is more flexible, adaptive and responsive to change.*" (pg. 199). In this environment new churches will probably look and function quite differently from each other and the traditional church. Church Order and denominational "norms" may slowly give way to partnerships, mutual accountability and joint ventures; and the apostolic leader is likely to exert more influence over networks and the community under his or her care.
5. *Communitas* [definition: *I belong and exist FOR the purpose - rather than the church existing for me.*] New churches and missional communities may be seen as more radical. They will have a deeper sense of being "in it" together and therefore will take greater risks for the sake of the Gospel. Their mantra will be "*me for the community and the community for the world.*" We can expect more passionate and uniquely functioning churches and communities.

New Forms of Church Planting

Going forward new church plants and missional communities could look substantially different. They might take any of the following forms:

1. A home church made up of multiple small groups meeting in homes led by a pastor who discipled lay leaders to reach their neighbourhoods for Christ. Victor Ko is already deploying this model in Classis Alberta North with Mosaic House.
2. A ministry targeted specifically toward a particular immigrant group in which a part-time lay pastor ministers to his or her respective people group. Supported and supervised by an established church this person's ministry work includes leading monthly worship services, baptizing, and celebrating the Lord's Supper.
3. A young adult ministry that meets on Sunday evenings in an established church building using an alternative worship style including an evening meal and the Lords Supper.
4. A diaconally focused ministry made up of individuals and small groups passionate about community development and serving the poor. This group could meet twice a month for worship and use the other two Sundays to minister in their surrounding community. A shared, rented facility in a high needs area could serve as the geographic focal point for the church and community.
5. A group of 10 Christian couples "takes over" or intentionally develops and constructs a condo complex and begins to meet for worship in its common room on Sunday mornings.
6. A satellite site from a larger church that employs video teaching from a mother church on Sunday mornings but otherwise functions independently

These are but a few of the models that might be imagined and developed.

A Way Forward

CHMC and Classis must develop a strategic plan that takes into full consideration the developing trends and dynamics in our culture. Wisdom dictates that CHMC and Classis focus on creating the optimum *conditions* for church planting and *missional* communities rather than setting artificial goals of how many and what type of communities ought to be planted. Hirsch contends that these new missional movements and networks may well spread like viruses, if so it makes sense to encourage the virus's spread rather than dictate how the virus should be spread. One thing that is not an option for the evangelical church is to hinder or prevent the spread.

This report recommends that Classis Alberta North encourage and equip the CHMC to focus on making progress in seven areas to create favourable conditions for prolific church planting. The ways and means by which they are realised may be a departure from previously held ideas and approaches, but critical in this is to grow an

atmosphere of trust, acceptance and support across the Classis for the pursuit and development of these new church communities. The seven areas are as follows:

1. Prayer - Classis Alberta North will commit to bathing this new movement in prayer – prayer without ceasing. Through a variety of means including creative communication, partnering and story telling, the churches of Classis Alberta North will be encouraged to pray for the unleashing of the Holy Spirit, and how they might participate in the growth of multiple missional church communities.
2. Education - Classis will identify effective means by which a compelling vision for church planting is can be cast in the region. These means might include sending out church plant leaders to the churches to share their stories, establishing a website, optimizing technology for communications, and planning and promoting events.
3. Leadership Development – Classis will commission CHMC to explore the various ways leaders can be raised up for the specific purpose of planting and establishing new church communities. This will include everything from importing qualified leaders from other locations (as we did with Victor Ko) to the development of local leadership through the newly established Missional Training Network (MTN).
4. Fund Raising – Classis will commit an ambitious dollar amount to church planting each year as a way of valuing and encouraging church planting in the region. Disbursement of funds will be at the discretion of the CHMC in consultation with the Regional Home Mission Leader. Funds shall be distributed in accordance with the guidelines already approved by Classis. CHMC shall also endeavour to raise additional funds for church planting in the region through partnerships and fund raising initiatives.
5. Partnerships – Classis will encourage CHMC to explore partnerships that will expand church planting opportunities. This might include partnering with other denominations, education institutions, para-church organizations, business and service organizations.
6. Criteria & Guidelines – Classis will encourage the CHMC to develop a comprehensive set of guidelines in relation to supporting various church planting and missional enterprises. These guidelines will be approved by Classis and endorsed by the Regional Home Missions Leader.
7. Accountability - CHMC will provide annual reports to Classis to outline
 - The continuing evolution of Church Planting
 - The nature of the communities that develop
 - The growth of these new churches within the Kingdom
 - The value to their respective communities
 - Annual goals and outcomes

F. Summary

The CHMC recognizes that some may see these goals and outcomes as a departure from the Church's traditions and practices. It is our hope and prayer however, that Classis Alberta North accept and support those who **are** called and **do toil** at the leading edge of societal and cultural change. These are challenging times for the Church of Jesus Christ, so let us give every encouragement to those called and given the passion and zeal for "Planting".

The CHMC will remind Classis that this effort is NOT the entirety of its mandate. Work will continue in identifying areas where established churches can also minister effectively in outreach. This report however, and the subsequent work it will entail, concentrates on the specific task of Church Planting

Submitted on behalf of the CHMC

Church Planting - a Way Forward

Discussion Points

Accepting the premise that Classis AB North is committed to Church Planting:

1. What is the level of awareness for Church Planting in your local church?

What is the level of awareness of the challenges involved?

2. Does the description in the report of our “changing society and culture” resonate with you?

Does it resonate with your Church?

If so, is this reality given consideration when planning/delivering ministry program(s)?

3. Do the five points in Section C represent a process and structure that Classis can embrace

Can you as a Church leader embrace this personally?

4. Do the six alternatives listed in Section D represent "True Church"?

Can and will Classis Alberta North support such church communities- in spite of differences?

5. Does Section E outline realistic and achievable goals?

Feel free to write additional comments and suggestions on the reverse of this questionnaire. All comments will be gratefully accepted, reviewed and summarised.

Report to Classis Alberta North Christian Reformed Chaplaincy Committee March 3, 4, 2009

Your chaplaincy committee managed to meet four times since last October's fall session of Classis. Although it is always a bit of a job to schedule meetings which rarely accommodate all our members, your committee is pushed by the importance of being there for, and with, chaplain Rick vanManen. His task, wonderful as it may be, is a huge challenge. He needs to experience we are with him, we share his task, and we are a component through which the Lord inspires and enlightens him to become an ever more influential part of the university scene.

It could be said we met five times, since most of us were present at a highlight in our chaplaincy program, namely Rick's induction into the ministry of the gospel in an ordination service arranged by his "home" church, Covenant CRC. Great was the celebration joy.

A member of our committee, U of A student Alyssa Cupido, is working with Rick under a program funded by Home Missions to encourage "emerging leadership" in the work of university chaplaincy.

One item taking a fair part of our meeting time, on an ongoing basis, is how to raise the level of public exposure of our chaplaincy program, the exposure of both Rick and the service he renders. That exposure needs to be broadened in the university and our own circles. Those who enter the educational worlds, where Christ is far from all, need to become aware of our chaplaincy program giving guidance and encouragement to all. How do we raise Rick's profile in our numerous circles of home, school, and church to guarantee that also on the university level there is guidance so that no one needs to remain confused over what the world is really about. That is a challenge that won't leave us, the committee, alone for even a single meeting.

Your committee hopes to welcome a team from Home Missions to help us evaluate our campus ministry on March 17 and 18. The review team will likely consist of Virginia Lettinga, a CRC campus minister at the University of Northern B.C, Martin Contant, Home Missions regional Leader, and possibly also Paul Verhoef, CRC Campus Minister at the University of Calgary.

This report is late on reaching you due to (1) the lack of stomach for reporting on the part of the reporter, (2) the decision by the interim committee to discourage all to report at each session, and (3) the reporter not receiving communication from the clerk of Classis. I apologize for my part. Of more importance is the following: the report is here because the Chaplain committee found the "rule" for it to report only in the fall, or, by way of the chaplain, most unacceptable.

Sincerely, Chaplain Committee, Stefan Slomp, Janet Wesselius, Alyssa Cupido, Leo Mos, Joanne Romyn, and Neil Vriend.

Neil Vriend. Chair.



Christian Reformed Home Missions

Following Christ. In Mission Together.

CRHM Board Meeting Report to Classis Alberta South/Saskatchewan

February 2009 Board Meeting

At Home Missions, we are motivated by the truth that engaging in the Mission of God is not an option but central to the calling of the church and our calling as CRHM. We thank God that we can be part of our denomination's vision "... express the good news of God's kingdom that transforms lives and communities worldwide." This chapter of our journey as CRHM is a time of great fruitfulness, resource challenges and an opportunity to make strategic choices. The meeting of the board on February 11-13, 2009 was a time for the board to give significant leadership to all three of these.

Our board meeting included time for stories, reports, significant conversations and prayer. The devotional times and the times of prayer provided the *spiritual context* in which deep discernment could take place. This meeting also marked a time of *transition* meeting as Ben Vandezande assumed the role of interim Director of CRHM. We are truly thankful for a good transition after John Rozeboom retired in the fall. The board is looking forward to working with Ben during this interim period of the next two years as we prepare for and a new chapter in Home Missions' journey.

Ministry Fruitfulness

We began our meeting with stories of *God's faithfulness to His Mission* in the world through the partnerships with CRHM. This fruit is in part due to our transition to regional teams and working through partners. Here are some examples:

- Thirty new churches are beginning this year through partnerships at the local level.
- Sixty new leaders are being cultivated including sixteen emerging leaders at campus ministries and twenty-three internships and ten residencies at churches.
- Regional Ministry Teams are growing their capacity to serve local congregations so that we now reach more with assessment and renewal processes.
- Increasing numbers of pastors, leaders, ministry staff, small group developers and prayer coordinators are gathering in clusters for support and growth.

Exploring new ways of partnering

We heard reports from staff of the work of developing *new ways* of carrying out our ministry as an agency. Here are a few of the avenues we are exploring right now:

- Developing new approaches to grant funding of new work
- Developing new resources for revitalizing/redeveloping of existing congregations so that they focus on God's mission.
- Expanding the potential for clusters of churches to sustain leaders, churches and campus ministries to help create a missional movement.
- Imagining the potential for new sites for campus ministries especially in the US.

Engaging Financial Challenges

For the past several years CRHM has balanced its budget by using our reserves. We have been working on a plan to *shift to a balanced budget* in the coming 2-3 years. That challenge was recently compounded with the crisis in the global economy. In the past three months we have experienced a significant decline in income from our reserves and there is also a decline in revenue in above ministry share giving. That increases the challenge we face to balance the budget and sustain significant ministry.

For the *current* budget year, the board decided to draw on the reserves rather than make deeper cuts in ministry. As a result we will be able to pay 95% of our grants for this budget year. All of our program budgets have also been reduced by 5%. For the *next* budget year, beginning in July 2009, the board decided to make an across the board reduction of 5% in all areas of the budget including grants, budgets for Regional teams and all of our ministry teams. This coupled with an adjustment in the benefits of employees along with a salary freeze (which applies to all agencies) and some increase in revenue will reduce the deficit by \$1 million.

Discerning Strategic priorities

The board realizes we are in a *unique* time as an agency when we see fruitfulness as never before and at the same time significant resource challenges. We are seizing the opportunity to use this time to discern priorities and make some strategic choices. We want to continue to see ministry flourish while at the same time shift the way we resource and carry out ministry. The board has endorsed a *strategic priorities process* to help us discern how we proceed in our next chapter. We will be discussing questions such as:

- What are the “main things” that Home Missions is called to do?
- How can we build on our unique capacities as CRHM and what are the issues / opportunities we need to engage?
- What will be the priorities for ministry as we move into the next chapter?
- What paradigm shifts do we need to make to act on our unique mission?

The board spent an evening engaging with staff team leaders in a round table conversation on capacities and critical issues and having glimpses of the future. The following morning the board gave its input to these questions. A team is in place to guide this process with the expectation of a significant progress report by the September meeting of the board.

We are thankful

We *give thanks* to God for the strong ministry partners throughout North America. We are privileged to have an engaged staff team and fruitful regional ministry teams. They want to serve and grow the mission of Home Missions and the CRCNA by aligning with God’s mission. This interim period provides CRHM with an opportunity to take a fresh look at things and build on our God-given strengths, make some choices and shifts that are needed for even greater ministry fruitfulness. We *welcome* your reflections, input and prayers as we engage in this journey.

Phil Reinders,
CRHM Board delegate, Alberta region,
and CRHM Board President