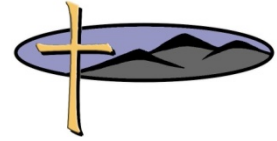


Annual Report of the Executive Minister of The American Baptist Churches of the Rocky Mountains



Rev. Steve Van Ostran, D.Min.

It has been a good year for the Region in terms of its ministry efforts and for me personally as I serve you as your executive minister. My family and I continue to settle into the Rocky Mountain region and to allow it to become our home, enjoying the many things that make this region unique. We consider ourselves blessed to be here and to serve you. To work with so many wonderful people who are seeking to be Christ's physical presence here is indeed a gift.

In shaping my work among you, I have identified a few key areas to guide my work and will utilize these same key areas to frame this report.

Vision

I believe one of the key tasks of my position is to help the region board, staff and membership in determining what it is that God is calling us to do and to be in our cooperative ministry. Last year the Board identified seven core values which it believes should serve to guide the ministry of the region and wrote what I would call is a purpose statement for our ministry:

*Christ-centered congregations connected by grace-filled relationships to reach all nations
as the hands and feet of Jesus. Committed to the Gospel! Learn it, Live it, Share It, Be it!*

The challenge then is to begin to take these core values and this statement and allow them to guide us in the ministry that we do. To that end, staff met in a two day retreat to talk about what this means along with the current realities in the Region. To that end we identified three areas of focus for us as a staff: Church Leadership, Local Church Health and Vitality, and Glocal Mission. We seek to focus our efforts on those ministries where there is a synergy of these foci and limit our time and energy in ministries that don't support these key foci. Elsewhere in this book there is a visual representation of this that will help clarify how this helps us better understand as a staff and board our priorities for ministry with, to and on behalf of our member congregations.

Having identified desired priorities is only part of the battle. The real challenge is to take those priorities and keep them as that. In the coming months we will be spending time as a staff and as a board to sharpen our focus and to better understand how we can make these priorities more real in our ministry. But even as we do this we will be seeking the "buy in" and commitment of our membership to these priorities.

We (region staff) have developed several resources to help share this vision with our congregations and to encourage personal and corporate involvement on the part of our membership. It is our intention to share this more broadly as we continue to do our work of developing relationships with the churches and leaders of ABCRM in the coming year.

Pastoral and Local Church Relationships

I am a pastor at heart and therefore value personal relationships. I have been working hard during my time here to get to know the pastors and leaders of the congregations that are ABCRM. While I have been unable to make it to every congregation for a personal visit, I have visited well over 2/3 of our member congregations in some way. I am systematically reviewing our membership list to see which congregations and pastors I have not yet made significant contact with and seeking opportunities to meet and get acquainted with them. It is my desire that when I or any other of the staff call on a church that there is not the impression that the region is: a) looking for money or b) there is a problem in the church that needs to be addressed. While these are times when we must contact our member churches, it should not be our primary point of contact.

In addition, I have encouraged our Coaches to make this aspect of their ministry a priority as well. We are trying to track our personal contacts with local congregations to be sure that we do not unintentionally neglect

any of our membership. Still, given the limited number of staff we have and the large geographic area that makes up our region, there are those congregations with which we have limited contact. We will continue to work at making personal contact with all of the member churches and their leadership a priority.

My preference is to spend times with churches during their worship hour. One gains a fuller sense of who the congregation is when we worship the Lord together. When possible I ask to preach in order to share the vital message I feel God has called me to give to local congregations, viz. that they need to reclaim their nature as “the Body of Christ” in their community. This is in many ways difficult for me because for my 18 years as a local church pastor and five years on Central region staff I refused to “reuse” sermons. Feeling called to take this message to our congregations; I have to find new ways to tell this message without compromising the texts. So, for the first time in my ministry, I am reusing sermons (I feel so unclean.... But it feels good to get that off my chest!). I realize that this is but one avenue to share this message, and continue to find new ways to share this story.

Incarnational Church

In addition to seeking opportunities to share in the local church my conviction that it is to *BE* the Body of Christ in its community, I have tried to communicate this message in other ways this last year. I have written an article each month talking about the various aspects of the Incarnated Church. It is my hope that these articles are beginning to encourage church leaders to think about how their particular congregation embodies Christ in their own community. One of the realities of our world is that every community and every congregation faces unique situations and challenges. “Being Christ” to a community will depend upon these challenges so we have to help our churches interpret their unique context and minister the love of Christ there.

I have been developing a workshop to offer to individual congregations to introduce some specific tools to help them meet this challenge of being present in a particular community and offering life changing ministry there. This workshop was piloted at First Baptist Church of Laramie in September and plans are being made to offer it other churches in the coming year.

Denominational and Ecumenical Relationships

Finally, one of the other unique responsibilities I have is to represent you in a number of denominational and ecumenical relationships. We are blessed to have Rev. Dr. Mary Hulst as president of ABC-USA and Rev. Dr. Jim Peters representing us on the General Board of ABC-USA. As your Executive Minister, I sit on two national councils, the Regional Executive Ministers Council and the General Executive Council. Both councils serve in an advisory capacity to the General Board and seek to coordinate the various ministries that are ABC-USA. Additionally I attended this year’s Biennial Gathering.

It is a great privilege to serve the churches and people of the ABC of the Rocky Mountains. I am convinced that together, with the guidance of the Holy Spirit and the commitment of our leaders and congregations, we can become the hands and feet of Christ in Colorado, Wyoming, New Mexico and Utah.