

ABCNW Assessment Report and Recommendations

Assessment Conducted by Dr. Bill Hoyt of NexSteps Consulting
Report Recommendations adopted by the Region Board April 9, 2010
Summary written by Dr. Charles Revis, Executive Minister

Background

Starting in mid-2009 the ABCNW Region Board contracted with Dr. Bill Hoyt to conduct an assessment of the Region's vision, ministries and health with a view towards making recommendations for the next steps towards increased effectiveness.

Dr. Hoyt has worked with our Region in various ways. He has been a coach to our Executive Minister, Charles Revis. He gave significant input to the design of the Leadership Learning Community (LLC) Ministry along with conducting initial training sessions for the Mentor Pastors. He has also worked with the Region Board as it has honed the Region's mission and focus. He has been a strong advocate for leadership development, church transformation and church planting. With his evangelical commitment, church and denominational consulting experience, and fifteen years as an executive minister with the Baptist General Conference he has been a good match in lending his expertise to our Region.

Assessment Aim

In contracting with Dr. Hoyt, the Board was especially desirous to gain his perspective on the following issues:

1. The role and effectiveness of the Leadership Learning Communities
 - a. How might their work be extended to lay leadership?
 - b. Could they be the basis for localized training and connectivity?
2. The role and effectiveness of the Area Structure. Specific questions were:
 - a. Are Areas still viable?
 - b. If so, at what level?
 - c. Should the Area structure be abandoned in favor of a more effective approach? If so, what might that be?
3. Review present Staffing arrangement.
4. Assess progress with the Region's Vision and Landmarks.
5. Make suggestions for the Region's next steps.

Assessment Process

In response Dr. Hoyt requested a significant amount of information from the Region including the following: church statistics, roster of member churches, process for ordination, staff position descriptions, Area Rules of Procedure, samples of Regional

communication with the churches, historical documents, history of training events, and more.

A feedback group was assembled to assist Dr. Hoyt in the design of an online survey for gathering viewpoints from across the Region. When the survey was finalized pastors and lay leaders were invited to go online and take the survey. 171 people completed the survey and the results were compiled in a "Data Book." Once the survey was completed Dr. Hoyt led the Region staff and the feedback group through a discussion of his findings. During this meeting he floated potential recommendations for the group's reflection and comment.

Assessment Report & Recommendations

Dr. Hoyt presented his findings and recommendations to the Region Board on January 12, 2010. The presentation lasted most of the day with excellent interaction between the Board and Dr. Hoyt. The report was later adopted at the April Region Board meeting with instructions for staff to begin implementing the recommendations. This initial report provides a brief overview of the high points of Dr. Hoyt's presentation and is presented to the 2010 ABCNW Biennial delegates for their prayerful consideration.

In his introductory remarks Dr. Hoyt said that he expected to find stability and health within the Region. He was pleasantly surprised to discover a greater degree of stability and health than he anticipated. He reported the presence of a solid foundation that will help the Region move to the next level. An important component to this foundation is the Leadership Learning Communities (LLC). They have become an integral part of the Region's ministry and will be a great asset as the Region moves towards the future. The Region also has resources for accomplishing its mission, although these resources are not in great abundance.

The report indicated that a significant number of people are satisfied with the Region's work. This is an important indicator given the fracturing of the Region during the ten-year period prior to 2003. There has been considerable unification within the Region around its mission and ministry as well as increased trust towards the Region. It is important that we not gloss over this progress. We give thanks to God for the new day that has unfolded.

Yet there is work to be done. Respondents wanted increased lay leader development, increased effectiveness in serving churches, more emphasis on and involvement in Church Planting. There is also a desire for greater evangelistic fervor and effectiveness among the churches.

ABCNW Mission

Dr. Hoyt affirmed the Region's Mission to *"grow healthy, mission-focused churches that multiply disciples"*. He commented that often middle-judicatory bodies have little conception of their mission. This is usually the locus of much remedial work. Not so with ABC-NW. The Mission is clear and embraced by many. He recommended adding two words, *"and churches"*, to the end of the statement. This would communicate the high priority of new church planting along with the present commitment to making disciples.

He stressed that the primary means for attaining the Region's mission is through Leaders. To fully accomplish its mission the Region must concentrate its efforts on identifying, resourcing and empowering leaders for church health and church planting. Without significant attention given to leadership development, much of what the Region endeavors to do will be unattainable. Therefore, Dr. Hoyt recommends the employment of the following tagline to the mission statement: *Identifying, resourcing and empowering leaders for church health and church planting.*

ABCNW Landmarks—Leadership, Church Transformation, Church Planting & Connection

Dr. Hoyt affirmed the current Landmarks, but gave recommendations on their priority. Essentially, the Landmarks serve as organizing foci for the work that the Region seeks to accomplish. As such they have functioned as helpful guides for marshaling the Region's resources.

According to Dr. Hoyt, the first landmark of "Leadership" should be the Region's "Unifying Strategy" as explained in the previous comments on leadership. The second Landmark, "Church Transformation" should be the Region's first "Core" landmark. Church Planting should be the Region's second "Core" landmark.

Dr. Hoyt identified "Connection" as a valid landmark but only as it serves the priority of mission above relationship. In other words, association among churches primarily for friendship falls short of the purpose for Connection. This has been our historical experience. Historical records bear witness to the missionary emphasis of American Baptist churches as they gathered for annual meetings in this unchurched frontier. Most of the associational work of our Baptist forebears focused on planting churches, building facilities, securing additional pastors for the growing work and celebrating baptisms! Fellowship, although encouraged and enjoyed, was secondary to mission.

New Landmark—"Funding"

Dr. Hoyt also recommended adding "Funding" as a new Landmark to the existing four. His review of the Region's churches giving patterns revealed that far too many churches are failing to provide financial support for the Region. The Region is composed of 158 churches. In 2008 77.4% of the Region's income came from 32 of those churches. 51% (82) of the churches gave nothing to the Region in 2008. Another 8.8% (14) of the churches gave less than \$500 to the Region in 2008. These are troublesome statistics.

The report states that the "Region is achieving an amazing amount of ministry for a modest financial investment." Additionally, Dr. Hoyt reports there has been "excellent management of limited resources." In other words, the Region is getting a lot of bang for the buck. Yet, this is not sustainable, primarily because of the strain this situation creates for existing staff. Region Staff pays the price by carrying an increasingly heavy work-load and experiencing emotional stress. The threat of burnout is real.

Falling under the new "Funding" landmark Dr. Hoyt recommends that the Region Board create an aggressive fund-raising plan with a goal of increasing the Region's income by a minimum of \$100,000 per year by December 31, 2014. The plan should include strategies

for assisting churches in raising funds for their own programs and ministries. The Executive Minister must be freed for greater fund raising activities. And, consideration should be given to hiring additional staff to address this need. This recommendation is in line with direction that the Region Board had already established in its 2009 November board meeting and is welcomed. Steps are now being made to hire personnel with skills in Stewardship Training and Fundraising.

The Board anticipates a day in the future when at least one Region staff member (or, several part-time staff) will be available to help churches increase their bottom line through stewardship training, capital funds campaigns and directed giving through estate planning. Furthermore, it is hoped that staff will be able to increase the number of ABCNW churches who contribute to our mission together.

ABCNW Staffing

The report provided extensive evaluation of the present staffing arrangement. Presently the fulltime Region staff consists of the Executive Minister, the Associate Executive Minister, and the Office Manager/Accountant. Additionally there is a part-time Communications Resource person, a part-time LLC director (presently vacant) and budgeted funds for an office assistant to be employed on an "as needed basis." There are fourteen Mentor Pastors who serve as adjunct staff. Search consultants and congregational consultants are also employed on an as needed basis (these are very limited positions). Dr. Hoyt commended this usage of part-time staff while indicating that it is limited in its capacity.

Dr. Hoyt stated that there is across the Region appreciation for the present full-time staff is strong (Charles Revis, Patti Duckworth & Cherie' Vidovich). The report indicated that the "Region is understaffed for current ministries, and significantly understaffed if it is to move 'to the next level' of ministry and service." In addition to Funding, the primary Staff Leadership needs fall into two major categories: Church Health (consulting, leader development, coaching system, assessments and transitions) and Church Planting (resourcing LLC's for effective church planting and insuring the availability of eleven support systems for planters).

In order to take the Region to the next level Dr. Hoyt recommends that the Region establish a strategy for increasing the Region staff to 6 full-time-equivalent positions (in addition to the LLC Mentors) by the end of 2014. This includes the recommendation of a Funding staff member as previously discussed.

Also the report urges that the staff expend its primary energies upon its islands of health and strength. Furthermore it is recommended that staff refuse to serve (or serve on a fee basis) all churches that do not give to the Region or who give less than \$500 per year to the Region. The report also calls for the completion of a staffing plan by the end of December 2010. The plan would identify which seats should be on the bus, and who should occupy the seats, to use language borrowed by *Good to Great* by Jim Collins.

ABCNW Geographic & Connectional Challenge

The ABC of the Northwest was formed as a Region out of four pre-existing State Conventions through a protracted nationwide denominational restructuring process from

1973 to 1976 (SCODS and SCORS). Once the Region was formed many lamented the daunting challenges that came with the expanse of this new geographical unit.

The new national structure required the formation of “Representative Districts” from which to seat board members on the General Board, the governing body of ABC-USA. This template was also employed for determining the geographical parameters within which the churches would be organized for connection and various ministries that had previously transpired either in local associations or through State Conventions. Thus Areas came into existence after the Region had been formed and was laid over pre-existing local associations. The Region assigned staff to serve these Areas, usually in the form of an Area Minister. The existence of Areas and their relationship to the Region were determined and controlled by the Region (both through the Region’s official by-laws and through the actual functioning of the Region and Area).

Most Regions across ABC-USA have found themselves struggling with the Area as a ministry framework. Shrinking finances have aggravated the situation, making it impossible for Regions to keep Area Ministers in the field. As a result many ABC Region have jettisoned the Area framework, and most no longer have Area Ministers. ABC of the Northwest is no exception. Yet, there has been a lingering effort to maintain some semblance of Areas within the Region. The results have been inconsistent at best.

Based on his findings Dr. Hoyt made the following summary observations regarding Areas within the Region:

- Connection across the Region is stronger than many realize. The primary source is the LLC’s.
- Connection is missing for those who found it in Area life, personified in the Area Ministers and for those who benefitted from the social interaction the Regional bureaucracy with its numerous entities and positions provided.
- For many long-timers the focus of connection was relationships.
- For most younger pastors and leaders, their connectional focus is around mission and ministry (a cause, a project or a movement) with relationships being secondary to and a by-product of missional involvement.
- The memory of close relational connections through the Area structure is true for some, but not for all.

Dr. Hoyt made it clear in his report that Areas are no longer economically or functionally viable. The Region should pursue better delivery systems for its work.

The good news is there are available alternatives that have the capacity to carry aspects of Area life that need to continue. The Region has done the hardest part, the creation of the LLC’s. The vast majority of survey respondents who “saw” a better structure than Areas named the LLC’s as that entity. Therefore Dr. Hoyt recommends building on the localized networks that have emerged with the LLCs.

He recommends that each LLC sponsor an annual time of fellowship and training for all the churches in their geographical area. Connection may be further strengthened through the expanded use of technology, from virtual meetings to online training, from increased use of electronic communication to website information centers. These virtual connections will give rise to localized face-to-face connections.

In the same vein, the report recommends the establishment of a "Church Champions Initiative" This would be a team of volunteer "Church Champions" whose job is to:

- Be a spokesperson for the church to the Region
- Be a spokesperson for the Region to the church

He also recommends the creation of a "Family News" page on the Region website on which church news can be posted by church leaders. Much of the genuine need for connection will "backfill" as training and mission involvement occur.

Region Governance

The previous discussion of Areas naturally leads into a brief observation of the present governance system of the Region. Many local churches have been encouraged to simplify their structures. Dr. Hoyt's report makes the same recommendation to the Region. Dr. Hoyt observes that the present system is "outdated, somewhat cumbersome and is in need of downsizing and modernizing."

The specific recommendations under this heading are to adopt the "Accountability Model of Governance." In improving the present structure Dr. Hoyt recommends eliminating the Areas. Leadership positions on the Region Board should be altered with a new system that provides a process for electronic voting by the churches. The Board will populate all departments and task forces.

ABCNW Events

The Report indicates that the Region's constituency highly values the All Region Minister's Conference, ranking it as the most effective Region event. Tools for the Trade (a western WA annual training event in March) is the Region's second most effective event. The Biennial Celebration is seen as less effective than these, and the Annual Area Conventions are at the bottom of the list.

Based on these findings Dr. Hoyt recommends the following in respect to the Region's Events:

- Continue and improve upon the All Region Minister's Conference.
- Expand *Tools for the Trade* (or similar training event) to the entire Region using LLC's as sponsor and/or coordinator.
 - The LLC's sponsor and promote participation within their geographic area.
 - The churches of the LLC generate funding for the event.
 - Regional staff and recruited volunteers assist the LLC and do the "heavy lifting" in regard to program and resource people.
- Raise the Regional Biennial Celebration to "a higher level" of effectiveness
 - Time will help overcome the "bad taste" some still have from when it was the scene of conflict

ABCNW Services and Resources

The Region provides a wide variety of services to its churches. The survey was designed to discern which services are most appreciated among pastors and churches. According to gathered input the most valued services provided by the Region are Identifying and Placing Interim Pastors; Licensing, Ordaining and Maintaining Ministerial Standards; and Pastoral Search and Placement. Resourcing Church Planting is highly valued by both pastors and lay leaders. Coaching Pastors is highly valued by both pastors and lay leaders. LLCs are highly valued by both pastors and lay leaders.

All full-time staff—along with mentor pastors, search consultants, church health consultants and coaches—devote a large percentage of their time towards the provision of these services. Churches with long-term pastorates may tend to overlook the fact that the Region is constantly providing these services. At the time of this report the Region is providing guidance for a dozen churches that are in between pastorates. This is demanding work that often strains the resources of the staff. Yet, essential to the sustenance of church health is the provision of interim pastors and the securing of excellent pastoral leadership.

The recommendations in this category are essentially to continue this work that is already being accomplished. Improvements can be made in networking across the nation to locate high quality ministers as well as expanding coaching services. The report also recommends creating expressions of LLCs for lay leaders and associate staff.

Communication Challenge

The Assessment confirmed what many realize, communication is not reaching lay leaders. There is plenty of information on the Internet, but many are unaware of what is there. The primary target, according to Bill Hoyt should be Pastors and Lay Leaders, rather than the average person occupying a pew on Sunday morning. This requires extending the Region's contact database. Also, constant attention needs to be given to telling the stories of what God is doing among the churches: Baptisms, growing churches, church plants, model leaders and transformed congregations. All available forms of technology must be employed.

ABCNW Church Planting

The Assessment discovered a significant level of support for church planting among the ABCNW constituency. There were varying opinions as to who should initiate church plants. Some held the position that church planting is the Region's responsibility. Others saw it as something initiated by the Area or a local church. There is an increased feeling that the churches in a given LLC should initiate church planting.

Dr. Hoyt stressed the need for the Region to aggressively embrace church planting. At a sheer survival level new churches are needed to sustain a Region of churches. Far more importantly, new churches are more effective at reaching the lost than established churches. New churches inject excitement among the churches with whom they associate. Jesus Christ promised to build His church, and it pleases Him when we partner with Him in His purposes. Planting new churches is a significant way that established churches join the Head of the Church in this building work that He is doing.

Dr. Hoyt recommends the following:

- That the initiative for church plants comes from churches in the context of the LLC's. Rather than planting daughter churches, the Region should be considering how "families of churches" plant churches. We already have experience with this approach. The best example is that of the Union Community Church in Union, WA. The family of churches in the Far West Area worked together to launch this successful church plant.
- That the churches of the Region establish an aggressive church planting goal for the coming decade.
 - A minimum of 25 new church plants by 2020
- That the Region create a Plan (A Church Planting Initiative) that will enable it to resource the LLC's for effective church planting
- That the Region enter into a strategic alliance with J.D. Pearring and Growing Healthy Churches to provide the support systems necessary for effective church planting

Measurable Outcomes

Last, but not least, Dr. Hoyt challenged the Region Board, along with input from Region Staff, to establish concrete goals that can be tracked and measured. He is the author of the book (read in LLCs) *Effectiveness By the Numbers* and he approaches this issue seriously. He advocates for clear, measurable goals that give impetus to accountability and achievable plans. He recommends using the five Landmarks as Ministry Categories for which annual goals can be set.

Dr. Hoyt recommends employing the following Ministry Category and Goal Matrix:

- Leadership
 - Number of leaders trained
- Church Health
 - Number of churches experiencing numeric growth
 - Number of conversions marked by baptisms
 - Number of churches participating in some form or another in church planting
- Church Planting
 - Number of new churches launched
 - Number of new churches welcomed
- Funding
 - Increase in income for the Region
 - Number of churches supporting the Region financially
 - Number of churches with increased income
- Connection
 - Number of churches participating in Regional events
 - Number of churches benefitting from Regional resources (services

Conclusion

As one can discern, the Region Assessment and its Recommendations, is no small undertaking. Dr. Hoyt expended numerous hours with the board reviewing his findings and recommendations. The Report calls for significant planning and work from the Staff, the Region Board, and the Churches. Much of it was affirming of the new direction and ministries that have been established. It is upon this solid foundation that the next initiatives will be launched.

God is calling us to be a movement that reaches the Northwest, and points beyond, for Jesus Christ. He wants us, in our going, to make disciples and to plant churches. He also wants His Body, the church to be healthy, growing and moving outward for the goal of transforming lives and even towns, cities and whole states. The challenge is great, but our Lord is greater than the challenge. Let us join our hearts and our hands together as we accept the challenge to become all that God wants us to be in Christ. For His Glory Alone!

Now to Him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to His power that is at work within us, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever! Amen! [Ephesians 3:20-21]