

InterAct Ministries Joint Board Dialogue

Menucha Retreat & Conference Center, Corbett, Oregon
March 1, 2024

Members Present: *Brian Aitkin, Huron Claus, Randy Jackson, Keith Klippenstein, Daryl Kroeker, Dave Ley, Mike Matthews, Sheldon Penner, Dave Perry, Ray Prigodich, Peter Rogers, *Chuck Schaap, George Schultz, Dale Smith, and Jack Teeter.

*via Zoom

Absent: Dave Bedford, John Russell, and Bill Twichell.

Others Present: Greg Hamilton, Canada Field Director; *Steve Horsman, Alaska Field Director; *Lucas Orner, Russia Field Director; and, for the first part of the meeting, the wives of several board and staff members.

*via Zoom

Welcome

Dale Smith began the meeting at 9:00 AM by welcoming the participants. Huron Claus then led in prayer, after which each board member briefly introduced himself, telling where he's from, his current ministry involvement, and how he first got connected with InterAct.

Devotional

Sheldon Penner led us in a devotional time. He noted that this was his first time to do so. He had been hesitant to do this in the past, he said, since he's not formally trained theologically, and, in light of that, he explained that what he was about to say would therefore be not expository, but experiential.

Sheldon began by telling a bit of his life story. Because of kidney issues and other congenital issues, he underwent fifteen operations before the age of three, and his parents were told that he likely wouldn't make it past the age of five. Then, when he was in his teens, he was told that he likely wouldn't make it to adulthood.

Sheldon showed us his "miracle book," a notebook in which he has recorded many of the special things that God has done for him over the years. He then shared a few of the "miracles" he's experienced over the past year. To him, he said, a miracle is a particularly dramatic answer to prayer—something that happens sooner than one would ordinarily have expected. He was told a year ago that his kidneys were getting worse but that there were ninety people ahead of him on the waiting list for appointments at the dialysis facility. Yet, almost immediately, he received a call informing him that a space for him had opened up. He has no idea why he was allowed to jump the queue. And since the spot he was given was an afternoon spot, he was able to continue scheduling morning breakfast gigs. And over the past year, despite three hospitalizations, he hasn't had to cancel a single one.

Hardly ever at his thrice-weekly dialysis sessions was the needle getting into his arm on the first try. But after we prayed for him at our meeting a year ago, that's exactly what happened. Now,

however, he no longer has to leave home for dialysis. After being told that there was up to an eight-month wait to receive training for home dialysis, he was almost immediately pushed to the head of the queue—perhaps, in part, because he is a registered nurse—and being able to receive dialysis at home has given him more freedom. He actually enjoys his times of dialysis, he said, because it gives him opportunities to sit quietly, rather than working all the time. This past year also turned out to be a record year for his business, enabling him to buy a new vehicle for the very first time.

Life is not fair, Sheldon observed—either in a negative or positive sense. He recognizes that he doesn't deserve all the blessings he's received. And when things are not going well, he looks at his miracle book and reviews the "stakes in the ground" that he has recorded. In closing, he quoted 1 Chronicles 16:12: "Remember the wonders [God] has done, his miracles, and the judgments he pronounced. . . ." He said that he's thankful for every day God gives him and for everything God does for him.

Prayer

Dale offered a long list of specific things to pray about, including God's direction, effectiveness in ministry, God's provision, and various health issues and staff challenges (cultural/worldview issues, marriages, children, safety, intimacy with God, and succession). A number of us then led in an extended time of prayer.

Russia Field Report

Assuming that we all had read his report, Lucas didn't go through it in detail. He said he's very encouraged about the momentum that's beginning, because the need is great. The team, he said, is encouraged and has adapted well to the changes that have taken place in Russia over the last couple of years. Dale called our attention to the strategic plan for the Russian field that's included in the appendix to the board packet.

The team, Lucas said, is preparing to begin working in some of the more isolated areas and villages of Buryatia—something that is more difficult for indigenous believers than for InterAct personnel. To serve outside of an urban context is often financially difficult for local believers, because it's hard to find employment in more remote locations, and there are also linguistic barriers. In the past, foreigners serving with various mission agencies have tended to make only day visits to such locations, rather than taking up residence there, resulting therefore in not providing a model for local believers to follow.

In response to a question from Dave Ley, Lucas said that there are upwards of 100 villages in the Republic of Buryatia. The team hasn't yet settled on a specific area to target, and they probably won't be able to begin this sort of ministry for another two or three years. Some of the villages are so remote that it's impossible to drive there, except during the winter, when rivers are frozen. Some villages are dying out, while others remain strong.

Randy Jackson asked why so many missions have pulled out of Russia in recent days. In reply, Lucas said that those missions which are focused on working with ethnic Russians have come to the realization that there isn't all that great a need for foreign missionaries to work among Russians—that the national church is quite capable of doing the needed work. Therefore, when

the Russia-Ukraine conflict began, many missions concluded that the risk of remaining in Russia was too high.

Dale added that there are 450,000 ethnic Buryats, ninety-nine percent of whom are Buddhists. He also said that there are actually far more than 100 Buryat villages. Also, the number of ethnic Tuvans, who have Mongolian roots, is more than 250,000.

Dave Ley led us in prayer for the Orners.

Alaska Field Report

Steve Horsman began by giving a brief health update. Even though he wasn't experiencing any symptoms, doctors recently discovered eleven blockages in his arteries. And he doesn't feel any different now than he did before his recent surgery.

Steve went through several of the major points in his written report, in which he said that there have been a lot of encouraging developments in recent days.

- Believers in eight villages and urban areas have indicated that they would like a missionary to take up residence there. These are predominantly places where there is currently an absence of pastoral leadership.
- Toby Curtis has agreed to serve as assistant field director. The details of his job description are now being worked out.
- Steve has a particular person in mind to succeed him as field director, but nothing is definite at this point, and, of course, the choice of his successor is ultimately Dale's responsibility.
- Steve talked about the need for missionaries to understand the culture and to know how to present the gospel and teach the Bible in ways that fit the culture. Progress is being made in this area. In the new field training program called Equip Alaska, new missionaries will be trained first, before beginning their ministry, and will then be mentored. There will be a focus on self-care, one-another care, and "so what"; on dealing with conflict; on counseling skills; and on ministering at the worldview level, with an emphasis on identifying areas of the culture that are out of line with biblical principles.
- The annual conference is scheduled for August 5-10, with Leland Hotchkiss as the keynote speaker.
- Steve has been doing a lot of work in connection with the development of the Alaska Christian Education Network.

We ran out of time to ask Steve more questions, so he suggested that we email him with any additional questions.

Jack Teeter led us in prayer for the Horsmans.

We recessed at 11:50 AM for lunch and resumed at 1:03 PM.

Canada Field Report

Greg Hamilton began by noting that there is currently a lot of upheaval in Canada. He specifically mentioned the issues of residential schools and unmarked graves. While awareness has increased of unresolved issues that have often been largely ignored, the controversy over these issues is interfering with the needed healing process. As believers, our identity must first

be in Christ, not in our heritage, which is something that First Nations people must embrace. This is hard for them, however, given the emphasis placed on these issues in the media. And it's difficult for the missionaries—especially the younger ones—to know how best to navigate these issues.

Since we were expected to read his written report ahead of time, Greg assumed that there was no need for him to go through it in detail.

- He mentioned that he's been working on a way for semi-retired staff to continue receiving some support, and, as a result, several older missionaries have decided to continue serving on a limited basis.
- He touched on the Midway Bible Camp land issues.
- He said that we're on the cusp of seeing people who have been disciplined become disciplers themselves.
- He touched on the importance of maintaining long-term relationships between missionaries and First Nations people.

Greg then answered several questions.

Randy Jackson led us in prayer for the Hamiltons.

The meeting concluded at 1:42 PM.

Respectfully submitted,

Ray Prigodich, Recorder