

InterAct Ministries
Executive Director Report to the Board
February 2011

This year marks the 60th anniversary of InterAct Ministries. Over the course of those years InterAct has seen effective ministry across our Alaska, Canada and Russia fields. Literally thousands of lives have been impacted for eternity through the sacrificial service of InterAct staff over the course of the past six decades. I am just as proud to be associated with this organization today as I was when I joined it thirty-three years ago.

So how is InterAct doing as we stand at the cusp of our seventh decade of ministry? Our Russia ministry is developing nicely under the long-range leadership of Thomas Slawson. The team's vision is clear and strategy is in place to move us into the future. Political obstacles will be ongoing but Thomas is creatively facing the difficulties. The Alaska field continues to recover after the challenges it has faced in the last few years. These challenges include: a field still recovering from breaches in trust (real or perceived), loss of hope, loss of personnel, time intensive issues with properties, and a field director with minimal time available to lead the field (more about this later). In spite of these hurdles, clear vision and strategy are emerging under David's leadership. Ministry focus in Canada continues to be fairly broad, yet this field presently has significant momentum. Effective ministry is happening among three people groups, the staff has vision and strategy in place and morale across the fields is high. Specific details in each field director's report will flesh out this snapshot, but I believe this captures the big picture of the three fields.

Determining how to best lead a sixty year old organization that has recently gone through significant upheaval and loss has presented some challenges. A long history means operational patterns and organizational culture are firmly set. The good news is that recent struggles experienced by the organization encourage everyone to be more open to change. We are in the midst of a "teachable moment" ready and willing to look at new options.

Our ability to leverage this teachable window of time requires a high level of trust and a significant investment of time to achieve that trust. Each of our field directors is working hard to spend the relational time needed to develop trust. As they do so, they are being rewarded with staff that are increasing ready to follow. Although time intensive, this face-to-face contact with staff is essential to the rebuilding of InterAct. Leadership that leads from influence rather than position or coercion is only effective when built on a foundation of trust. This will prove even more critical as we bring on board new young people who desire significant mentoring, developing and encouragement.

As leaders, we tend to be impatient people. We want change and we want it now. But time is necessary if we are to see InterAct move forward. A sixty-year-old ship the size of InterAct does not turn in the water quickly. Time is required to rebuild trust, to develop field vision and to determine the most appropriate strategies. You will see from their reports that InterAct's field leadership team is doing just that. As they continue to do so I am confident that we will continue to advance in our mandate to see culturally relevant churches transforming communities across the North Pacific Crescent.

As expressed in my *Monday Musing* of December 6, 2010 (attached at the end of this report), I face the challenge of leading a multi-faceted organization like InterAct without top down directives. My understanding is that the boards desire a far greater level of autonomy be given to the fields. Leading by influence without significant "top down" leadership is not a simple dance to master. Though unwieldy at times, I am learning how to work with this process and find it far more affirming and effective. Fortunately, the fields are being led by strong visionary leaders in their own right and therefore are in good hands. It is apparent that the field directors have been extending to me the same grace in this journey that I am seeking to extend to them. Learning the proper balance between appropriate autonomy for the fields, while providing the proper degree of organizational direction is a growing process but we are moving in the right direction.

The macro vision for InterAct Ministries (both Inc and Canada) has been set. Within that vision each field sets its own vision. Each field director has done an excellent job developing vision and strategy. They are excellent leaders who are moving us forward in their respective areas of responsibility. My role is to strategize with them – to be a sounding board for them as they set their vision and strategies. And they have done so.

After reading the prior paragraph you may recognize the conundrum in which I find myself. If the macro vision for InterAct has already been set ("A culturally relevant church transforming every community in the North Pacific Crescent") and the field directors are the primary ones responsible for their field's vision and strategy, what vision is to be cast by the executive director?

Following much prayer, counsel and reflection I have come to four values that I am seeking to advance across the organization in the days ahead. While we have already been doing all of these to varying degrees, my intention is to see us grow in each of these arenas. Below are the four grids through which I am challenging all InterAct to look as they move forward with our macro vision and their field specific vision.

By God's grace I hope to see an InterAct Ministries that is marked by:

1. **Greater PRAYER at every level of the organization.** Without God's hand of blessing on our efforts, our energy is expended in vain. Could it be that we do not have all the

ministry success we desire because expend an inordinate amount of time “doing” and an insufficient time imploring Him? Looking to Him in prayer keeps ministry in perspective. He is the Lord of InterAct and prayer reminds us of our proper place in following His lead in this work.

2. **Increased PARTNERSHIPS with churches and organizations that enable us to more effectively accomplish our God given mandate** (a culturally relevant church transforming every community in the North Pacific Crescent). We will never accomplish our macro vision alone. We must seek strategic partnerships in every appropriate place.
3. **A host of new PEOPLE serving alongside us on all our fields and in our all our offices.** We must have the right new people if we are to accomplish our mandate. Without new people we will die. Once we have field vision and strategy in place we can and should aggressively pursue new people to serve beside us in our eternal venture. We will increasingly focus on, expend energy toward and cover with prayer our need for new coworkers in ministry.
4. **PROMOTION of InterAct taking place in a multitude of new places – churches, schools, individuals, etc.** This promotion is in the form of seeking a higher profile for the organization that will generate all of the above: more prayer, more partnerships and more people serving with us. Where number three above refers to seeking partnerships with other organizations, ministries and churches, “PROMOTION” refers specifically to promoting for the purpose of gaining new “PARTNERS” – partners who pray for us, tell our story and also give financially.

By God’s grace we are seeing growth in each of these areas. Although I believe we were already an organization marked by prayer, in the last months we have moved forward in a greater way on each of the fields and in the offices. Every field is presently involved in dialogue with other organizations, ministries and/or churches regarding potential partnerships. Our focus on recruitment is being ramped up with the addition of Jim & Becky Hamilton as full-time recruiters. Their strategy includes not only doing active recruitment themselves but also challenging and equipping staff for effective recruiting. In the “promotion” arena we have Diane Schoming on the road more frequently where she is doing a commendable job in telling our story at every available opportunity. We are learning what it means to promote InterAct well and we are growing in this much needed arena.

In addition to emphasizing the four values listed above, as per my job description, I am tasking myself to be proactive in working with each field director in determining field specific strategy. As vision and strategy are fine-tuned it becomes much easier to recruit new staff. More time will be devoted to dialogue with our mobilization department to encourage and influence toward greater effectiveness.

Direct Reports

Field Directors

David & Marci Joseph – David has made a good start in turning InterAct Alaska around. He has cast vision and is seeking to develop strategy to accomplish this vision. David’s ongoing responsibility as a fulltime church-planter and a more than halftime employee of the state make it exceedingly difficult to dedicate the time necessary to lead InterAct Alaska to solid ground. No matter how effective the leader, if there is not adequate time to lead the field will not move forward. I will be proposing some form of subsidy for David & Marci that will allow David to step away from the state job and allow more time for his InterAct leadership role.

Dan & Bev Mayerle – Dan continues to lead a very complex field. As his report reflects, after years of struggling he is now blessed with a strong administrative team. His sense of commitment and responsibility are working together to encourage overwork, but the “tyranny of the urgent” should lessen as the new administrative team picks up many of the details that have been carried by Dan. Dan is also being extremely diligent in visiting and connecting with each of the staff on his field. I suspect this is a strong part of the reason for the health of this field.

Thomas & Christy Slawson – Thomas has done a great job in working with his Russia team in developing vision and strategy. Their personal situation with their son, Isaiah’s, personal needs has required some creativity in how he does his job. Rather than live in St. Petersburg the Slawsons made the decision to live in Mississippi and run the field from there. This has caused some challenges, but with the use of modern technology it has proven viable. Most recent thinking has been to return to St. Petersburg for eight to nine months of the year in a leadership/church-planter/church facilitator role and spend three to four months of the year in Mississippi (necessary for Isaiah’s medical needs). Although this still places him at significant distance from the rest of the Russia team, it does allow him more direct involvement with Russia ministry.

Home office staff

Jerry & Beth Crosby – Jerry continues to oversee our Human Resource Management department. Along with the HR responsibilities Jerry directs InterAct’s mobilization efforts. As the result of Shawn Strannigan’s recent resignation, Jerry has picked up the mobilization pieces she had been carrying. With the addition of Jim & Becky Hamilton to the mobilization team there is considerable examination happening regarding how we can best move forward in this critical arena. Jerry also carries the important mantle of caring for all things related to InterAct’s cyber world.

Roy & Phyllis Martin – Roy continues to carry the responsibility for overseeing the big picture of InterAct’s finances. He continues to do this with excellence (see his report to the Finance & Audit committee). Roy also serves as the office manager for the Boring office. This includes formal and informal oversight of five plus staff and general running of the office – often including septic tanks, dry-walling, painting, etc. Roy is working on a long-term succession plan

but it will be extremely difficult to find someone with the gifts and commitment carried by this man.

Diane & Ked Schoming – Diane has grown significantly in her role as development director for InterAct. She tells our story well and makes us look good. The dollars she raises continue to increase as does the good will she brings to InterAct.

Member Care

George & Judy Richardson – Although Richardson's are named in David's Alaska report George officially reports to me. Their ministry of member care is proving a valuable encouragement to InterAct staff, SEND North staff as well as staff from a few other ministries. George and Judy are mentoring a Native couple from Kotzebue as well as continuing relationship with Native people from their forty years of ministry.

Conclusion

InterAct has strong leaders in place. We have an effective support team serving the organization from the Boring office. Jerry, Roy and Diane each carry critical roles in enabling the field teams to move ministry forward. David, Dan and Thomas are each excellent leaders who have the tools to necessary to advance InterAct's mandate – and are doing so. It is a pleasure working with the skilled and godly folks that comprise the Executive Leadership Team (Jerry, Roy, Diane, David, Dan, Thomas and I). It is an honor to serve with them in our shared God-given calling.

Thankful to be serving His purposes,
Dale Smith
Executive Director

Unless the LORD builds the house, its builders labor in vain. Unless the LORD watches over the city, the watchmen stand guard in vain. Psalm 127:1 (NIV)

Monday Musings

December 6, 2010

This (usually) brief document is an attempt to keep you informed about your organization and issues that affect you. Although it is not necessarily the best communication medium, I trust it still provides value as you get occasional glimpses of what God is doing in InterAct and how He is leading. With that in mind let me share a brief part of my journey.

In the initial discussion concerning my potential role as InterAct's executive director, the board committee clearly recommended leading with more autonomy on the fields. Since I believed my bent was instinctively in that direction, I felt this would be reasonable though not a seamless proposition. Someone has to balance the perspectives of multiple fields in a fair manner. Someone needs to make decisions about allocation of funds that come in to the whole organization – How are these funds to be dispersed? Someone needs to take responsibility (under the board) to assure that the organization is in compliance with the various laws of the land, and on and on. In my idealistic mind, I could just push decisions down to the fields and simply facilitate them in carrying out their agendas.

Pushing down authority is possible, and healthy, but it is definitely messier than I had anticipated. Again, that steep learning curve. I am discovering where it is possible to accomplish this goal – more or less. I can push strategy down to the fields. I can give more than just responsibility to the fields. Within certain parameters, I can give authority commensurate with the responsibility. But here's the rub. How much authority may I give away without abdicating my responsibility to the two boards?

Slowly the fog is clearing. I am coming to the understanding that InterAct has strong independent roots. We were formed out of the clay of independent Alaskan missionaries who came together largely for pragmatic reasons. This continues to be a part of our DNA. If "push came to shove" most of us would admit that we not only want authority moved down to the fields, we want it pushed all the way down to "me"! But the good news is that even though we desire to be fully autonomous individuals who answer only to God for our ministries, we choose to submit to certain restrictions for the sake of the gospel and God's glory. That is why we are able to function with multiplied effectiveness (synergy) – because we are more effective as a team than we are as a bunch of independents. And it works! And I thank God that we are choosing on a regular basis to set aside our independent spirit and work as a team and as teams!

Therefore, within some very broad parameters, strategy has moved primarily to the level of the fields. Thomas Slawson and his team are the architects of the strategy to accomplish InterAct's vision in Russia. Within InterAct's larger vision, David Joseph's team and Dan Mayerle's team will cast the vision and propose the strategies that will be used to accomplish the vision for their respective fields.

Now, if you are a real “keener” and have read this far, just *maybe* you are awake enough to see the conundrum in which I find myself. InterAct now has a new executive director. The baton has been passed. People are looking to this new leader to expound on his “vision” for this organization. To what new heights will he lead them? So here’s the crunch. InterAct already has an overarching vision: “A culturally relevant church transforming every community in the North Pacific Crescent.” This is the macro vision within which we work. Since vision for the field is best determined and executed by the fields, what vision is a new executive director supposed to bring to the equation? I’m so glad you asked! ☺

After much reflection, prayer and consternation I have come to recognize that there are still significant contributions that should be made by a leader who values the autonomy of the fields. It is likely that only former directors have read this far, so I will simply lay out the four vision components that I intend to flesh out in subsequent writings. I trust these will mark InterAct in the years ahead.

Before going there, let me give a very important disclaimer! The role of the executive director is far broader than the numbered items listed below. Developing teams, developing and challenging the leadership team, working with and providing oversight of two offices, directing organizational funds, staying current in the ever-changing world of missiology, providing spiritual leadership, speaking in churches and other venues, working with donors and prospective donors, involvement with the boards, being the face of the mission, writing numerous articles and letters, etc. It would be easy to be busy every minute of every day. But the four values listed below are a foundational part of the grid through which I choose to look as I seek to accomplish these functions. They are the personal perspective I seek to bring as I carry out the big picture of fulfilling my role as executive director!

By God’s grace I want to see an InterAct Ministries that is marked by:

1. Greater PRAYER at every level of the organization
2. Increased PARTNERSHIPS with churches and organizations that enable us to more effectively accomplish our God given mandate (a culturally relevant church transforming every community in the North Pacific Crescent)
3. A host of new PEOPLE serving alongside us on all our fields and in our all our offices
4. PROMOTION of InterAct taking place in a multitude of new places – churches, schools, individuals, etc.

Stay tuned for further clarification on these four “P’s”. I am confident that as God allows us to continue growing in each of these four arenas we will see His kingdom move forward across the North Pacific Crescent.

God speed,

Dale