

# Executive Director Report to the Board

July 2020

Since we last met our world has undergone significant changes. This means there are huge changes in the way we do ministry. COVID-19 has impacted people living in every corner of the earth. Even our board meetings are happening in cyber form rather than face to face.

Carol and I spent most of March visiting staff and enjoying a wonderful field conference in Siberia. We began our trek home just as COVID-19 was peaking. Our trip took us from Ulan Ude, to Irkutsk, to Moscow, to New York and then Portland. Along the way we saw several “airport ghost towns” and extreme paranoia (full coverings of rain gear, plastic face shields, etc.). From Portland we drove home to Alberta, where we had the privilege of 14 days of self-isolation (a gift). Life as we knew it was no more. Ministry as we knew it was no more. Despite the major impact that had occurred worldwide, I was thrilled to see flexibility and creativity of InterAct leadership. At the leadership level, ministry changed, but it never slowed. Gatherings moved from face to face to Zoom and continued unabated.

On the front lines InterAct has been significantly affected. While some ministries have been impacted more than others, every staff member continues to adjust. Challenges have included: missionaries being prohibited from visiting on reserves, church-plants cancelling gatherings, distress over taking donor dollars during forced inactivity, Urban Fire with no one to mentor, discipleship meetings cancelled, youth events cancelled, Lazy Mountain events cancelled, summer camps cancelled, annual staff conferences cancelled, staff development venues cancelled. And this is the short list.

Rather than simply lament the losses let me mention some of the serendipities that have emerged from the COVID-19 quagmire. Online prayer meetings have proliferated, both with supporting churches and within the Interact family. Cyber tools like Zoom have become commonplace, allowing face-to-face connection anywhere. Staff training has advanced due to increased comfort with these new tools. New discipleship and leadership development meetings are currently happening that were not on anyone’s calendar prior to COVID-19.

One of the surprises for me has been the self-examination that has occurred from lack of face to face ministry. Our staff have had to wrestle with their motivation for ministry. Usually our motives are a mixture of pure motives and self-serving motives. The removal of the option to “just be busy” doing ministry has led many of our staff to rethink their busyness. Seeing staff re-evaluate the use of their time to maximize the eternal has been very gratifying. The outcome has been more intentionality in personal spiritual growth, discipleship, mentoring and prayer. I trust this continues post pandemic!

Despite the challenges, in places, God is moving us forward numerically. There are four couples actively working toward field deployment in Alaska. In addition, a fifth couple will have been through interviews by the time you read this. Thank you Lord! God seems to be sending us replacements for those we have lost to retirement, transfer or resignation, and Horsmans are doing a great job in loving them into the family. We rejoice – *and* we continue to pray to the Lord of the Harvest for His provision of new workers (Luke 10:2).

InterAct Ministries, Inc. saw the loss of around \$130,000 in the stock market in January. The market is coming back and I trust we will fully recoup those losses and move on to gains down the road. InterAct Ministries of Canada was not impacted negatively due to the more secure investments it carries. Giving

to missionaries and general funds have not significantly changed, despite the uncertainties caused by the pandemic. Every cloud has a silver lining, and there is a financial silver lining for both InterAct organizations - we are spending significantly less than we had budgeted. Although less assessment money is coming in for projects (because they aren't being done), we are also spending less due to current COVID-19 constraints. Only God knows how our financial situation will play out in the days ahead.

One financial concern I have is our property costs in Alaska. Although this is not a COVID related issue, it is one I want to alert you to, though not one calling for any action at this point. For the first time in over a decade, Alaska properties lost money instead of making money. I am sure you would agree that it is not in the best kingdom purposes for InterAct to be owning and managing properties that are personnel intensive and financially depleting. Just a heads up. (No, I am not even beginning to entertain thoughts of getting rid of the Lazy Mountain facility!)

One of the things you are likely concerned about, or should be, is leadership succession in InterAct. It continues to be on my radar and it is something I am actively working to advance. At present I meet weekly by Zoom with four other leaders/prospective leaders. Two of them have MBA's and each of them are excellent leaders already. At the time of this writing we have met for nine weeks and it is proving to be an excellent development tool. I plan to broaden this to another group of prospective organizational leaders down the road.

Another advance has been in the area of mobilization. With encouragement from the FLT, Dan Mayerle has led an interim group that has been the de facto mobilization director – a team we affectionately call the MOB Team. Now, Andy Chinn has been moved to Crossfield, AB, where he is being transitioned into the role of Mobilization Director. This overall process of getting a full-time mobilization director has seemed longer than ideal, but we are moving forward. Andy is already proving to be extremely capable.

Carol continues to head up the communications team for InterAct while also serving as my administrative assistant. Though there have been numerous candidates, most do not want to move to Oregon and this is not a role we can be easily develop remotely. I continue to look for a development director. Again, I don't feel it would be ideal to hire someone working remotely. I may ultimately have to end up doing this with a development prospect, but it is fraught with complications. Unless someone comes to us with a strong missions background and significant knowledge of InterAct, trying to mentor them into our culture and values would prove to be a significant obstacle. It may, however, be possible if there is a willingness to spend time with leadership and in our offices to learn the heart of our staff and organization.

So as of June 26, Dale and Carol now call Boring, Oregon home. We have put house hunting on hold until we return from NC in August. In the meantime we are living in the office apartment and two storage units. I am confident that being onsite in Oregon will greatly aid the rebuilding of that office. Our added presence will facilitate leadership transition, allowing InterAct to better serve Alaska, Russia and even Canada. Another couple brings a level of momentum and encouragement that is sorely needed. Hopefully it will also allow me time to better serve my direct reports who are currently receiving limited attention. It should also be mentioned that this move does not mean I expect to be left in the role as executive director for another decade. Rather, I continue identifying, training and investing in potential replacements. My hope would be to hand over the role to my successor in the next three to five years

and remain available to mentor and support the new leader (if appropriate). Of course, everything is subject to the board's direction.

As you will see from the field directors' reports, the up and coming mobilization director and Greg Hamilton's project review, I serve with an amazing leadership team. Jerry Crosby continues to do a great job in overseeing a host of administrative details as well as the InterAct facility in Oregon. Mike Hubbard continues to grow into his role as U.S. Finance Director. A gift he brings is a heart for the lost among the least reached peoples.

Thank you for allowing me to continue serving InterAct Ministries in the role of executive director. Thank you as well for your service to and support of this ministry!

A privilege to serve,

Dale Smith

*And my God will supply every need of yours according to his riches in glory in Christ Jesus. Philippians 4:19 ESV*