

InterAct Ministries Joint Boards
Executive Director's Report
March 2-4, 2023
Menucha Conference Center, Corbett, OR

InterAct Ministries has been around three years longer than I have been alive – and I turn 70 ten months from now. Two years ago, when we celebrated this organization's 70 years of ministry, I was reminded of our relative smallness. Though we may not be the biggest players, we have been faithfully advancing the gospel – for many years!

Eugene Peterson's book, ***A Long Obedience in the Same Direction: discipleship in an instant society***, well describes the work of InterAct and her missionaries over the decades. Some might see us as plodders. We aren't high profile. We don't really look like "movers and shakers." Rather, we move at the "speed of discipleship," which means relational depth, and this takes time. Relational discipling can feel tedious, often with fruit not obvious until many years later. "A long obedience in the same direction" describes us well.

As I look across the landscape of our organization, I see steady pursuit of relational discipleship. It is what we do best. Whenever we try to move into some form of flashy ministry (not that they are wrong), we find ourselves out of our depth. We are people who seek to invest deeply into individuals and small gatherings - a strategy that may not always make exciting prayer letters. Yet this kind of ministry strategy works, as disciples make disciples who make disciples! Like a pebble tossed into a pond, the ripples of this relational investment radiates with ever widening circles of Christ followers. *Thank you, Father, for letting this little organization be a small part of what You are doing around the world!*

The reflection above comes from the sense of nearing the end of my time in this role. No, I am not even close to being ready to step back at the end of month (unless asked by you). In fact, with the support of the team around me I can see myself, if asked, to continue in this role for two or three years. But that time is fast approaching. There is probably more to this discussion than would be best to put in the written record, so I will plan to talk a little more about this in my verbal report.

As you read the reports from the fields and finance team, you should be able to get a clear picture of where we are. Rather than waste time with what has already been said I will seek to summarize.

Canada

Canada is stable. Solid. Financially and otherwise. InterAct Canada's finances are healthy. The budget as presented is strongly in the black, although things will look different once "Site 6" gets underway. The first step of this project will be to put in a new road to the future campsite. Morgan is ready to get things moving as soon as the initial financial threshold is met.

Greg mentioned having a leadership team in place. Like all of us, he needs a team around him for advice, leadership development and sharing the leadership load. I'm thankful that his team is functioning and will be carrying an increasing amount of Greg's responsibilities. We continue to have need for help in the Canada office.

Because Dan Mayerle's leadership style was radically different than Greg's, there are several ways Greg is rebuilding. He recognizes the need for new vision and new staff to accomplish that vision. I see him moving toward that goal.

Canada is not seeing the growth in staff numbers that Alaska has recently received. There are many factors in this, even the political differences in treatment of Covid 19. Losses have included **Jesse Stigile**, **Travis Harms** (his wife never joined the organization), **Don and Kim Gillaspie** (they have been outside InterAct for some time) and **Andy Chinn** (Jesi continues part-time with InterAct and they remain part of the Calgary church-planting team). The gain to the Canada organization are Tim and Gwendy Colwell, in Ross River, Yukon. The Colwells have served at this ministry post for over twenty years. They come to us from SEND North. It is on the board agenda to discuss the home they are living in, as it is currently owned by SEND North.

Alaska

Right now, Alaska is a hopping place. With five new missionaries from SEND North (three units) and many staff who are relatively new (19 new staff in last four years in Alaska, five of which are the new SEND folks), there are many training and onboarding issues. This is a great problem – new workers that are clearly gifts from the Lord of the Harvest!

One of the things over which I have carried concern has been our need for support and pastoral care for our missionaries. While I would like to see good member care across the organization, I am thankful that we now have support for both physical needs as well as for the spiritual/emotional needs of our staff in Alaska (Jonathan and Amy DeVries, Mark and Rose Mowery).

Steve now has a leadership team in place providing a breadth of good council, while growing in their own leadership capacity and helping carry some of the load. I am not sure what the future holds, but there are two, maybe three, good leadership prospects that have come to us from SEND North (two in AK and one in Canada). Along with several godly mature leaders from the earlier pool of new AK staff, InterAct looks to have some good leadership prospects in Canada and Alaska.

Russia

Much is unknown about the safety of our staff in Russia. Lucas, Jamie and family just returned to their assignment in Krasnoyarsk last month. He assures me that he and his team all have exit strategies if that becomes necessary. Is there risk? Yes, and Lucas says he is willing to take that risk. I continue to allow our staff to stay, fully recognizing there is risk. Could something horrible

happen? Sure, but it is hard to read the New Testament and see a pattern of trying to avoid all risk when called to carry the gospel to scary places.

Shawna was able to spend five days with us this past week. It was a good time to debrief with her and to hear firsthand how the Buryat believers are faring in the place she serves. She acknowledges that it is stressful living in the current conditions in Siberia, but she is committed to travel back to Russia in May. Micah and Georgie Costanzo hope to arrive in Krasnoyarsk this spring to begin language learning. Frankie and Ira are still out of the country with hopes to get back soon. So much is uncertain! God knows!

Big picture of IMI

The financial plunge brought about for InterAct Ministries, Inc. is hopefully slowing. The combination of several years of poor market performance, Covid 19, retirements and departing staff have had a major impact on our financial picture. Although the market continues to be an unknown, the assessments from our many new staff in the U.S. organization has slowed the bleed. Hopefully we will continue to slow and ultimately reverse the negative trend, depending on the market and new staff. Fortunately, the U. S. organization has had a lot of depth. Were the downward direction not corrected there are steps that could be taken – but we are nowhere near that point. I continue to advertise far and wide for a development director to no avail (professional headhunting groups, churches, other mission orgs, etc.). As the board(s), I look to you men for help by looking for and spreading the word about the need! Not a desperate situation but something to note.

Now, let me throw in something that does feel desperate. Jerry Crosby retires the end of this month. As mentioned regarding a development director, we are currently advertising across the country, in churches, with mission organizations and more. Although Jerry will continue to work part-time, when he steps back from being office manager we lose a number of key functions: H.R., IT, office oversight and more. Finding a replacement who is willing to live in this area and has a missionary perspective, has proven elusive. As concerned stakeholders, your help would be appreciated to find candidates for these key roles. And please pray earnestly!

All InterAct

One of the pieces included in your board packet is a report on mobilization. Dan Mayerle has taken point on our efforts and is leading this well. Covid 19 really shut us down for several years and I am not sure mobilization will ever look like it did prior to Covid. The primary pond in which we have fished, historically, has been Christian colleges and schools. Even though we are being incredibly faithful in going to schools and telling our story, we are not seeing numbers commensurate with our efforts. Fortunately, at least for Alaska, and to a lesser extent Russia, God is bringing people to us. I am amazed at the number of people who have come to us looking for a place to serve, rather than us finding them. So, keep working at mobilization, doing the best we know how, and handling well those God drops on our doorstep. Clearly, effectiveness in this critical arena is God's domain! So, we pray for favor from Him for workers!

He told them, "The harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few. Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field." Luke 10:2 NIV.

You may not know this, but we are blessed to have Mike and Kathleen Matthews back on staff with InterAct (two more new staff members). Mike now serves as both board member and staff member (our by-laws allow for one staff member on the Inc. board). With two of the best mission trainers I know, Mike Matthews and George Walker, both available for training our staff, I dream of seeing InterAct develop a pre-field training program fully operational within five years. I believe a training program could be a huge draw for prospective outgoing missionaries, serving both InterAct and other organizations. To field the kind of program would require a lot of time, focus and financing, but it would be a great draw to young people considering missions. It would also be a great boon to the effectiveness of new staff as they seek to most effectively share the gospel.

'Nuff said. I'm out of words. Hopefully this report is enough to trigger any questions you may wish to pose to me when we are face-to-face.

It continues to be a pleasure to serve you and the people with whom you have entrusted me.

Thankfully submitted,

Dale Smith

Have I not commanded you? Be strong and courageous. Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged, for the LORD your God will be with you wherever you go." Joshua 1:9 NIV