

2019 Spiritual Life Report

100th Anniversary Edition

“Yesterday, Today and Forever”

Hebrews 13:8 says, “Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever.” With our first 100 years behind us, this Spiritual Life Committee has been chosen to focus upon the balance of where we have been, where we are today, and, where we are heading tomorrow. Some of the major themes that have been a part of our first 100 years are areas that our ministers and churches need throughout Northern California and Nevada tomorrow. Our district’s foundation includes: The Guidance and Direction of the Holy Spirit, Apostleship, Missions (Global/Domestic), The Word (Literacy), Training, Faith (Pioneering Spirit), Sacrifice, Stepping Out (Risk), and Unity (Denomination/Fellowship)

THE HOLY SPIRIT

Abe Daniel | Senior Pastor | Trinity Life Center, Sacramento, CA

Acts 1:8 says, “But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.” (ESV) This verse would be a perfect summary of the 100 years of ministry throughout the Northern California and Nevada Assemblies of God. While looking at our history, it is easy to see how this verse has become the template for how we have grown as a fellowship within this region.

Yesterday...

The power of the Holy Spirit is something that our NCN churches can trace back to the Azusa Street outpouring in 1911. Our founding Superintendent, Rev. Robert Craig’s experience while visiting this revival caused him to return home to San Francisco, CA, a city still recovering from the devastating earthquake of 1906. The move and power he encountered transformed this Methodist Preacher.

Craig experienced significant issues in his life after beginning ministry. He lost his first wife Theresa and son due to complications during childbirth. The church he Pastored, San Francisco’s Central Methodist Church had half of their congregation lost their homes during the 1906 earthquake. As he transferred to St. Paul’s Methodist Church for a season, failing health caused him to leave active ministry by 1910.

Now in southern California, depressed, ill and suffering from “spiritual impotence,” Craig experienced a fateful encounter on the Compton to Los Angeles train of the Pacific Electric Railway. He met James and Clara Berry, who later took him to a service at a local mission where Robert found answers to his spiritual despair. The Berry’s offered Robert their home to serve him as a spiritual cocoon. While there, Robert received the Baptism in the Holy Spirit and the promise from God that if he returned to San Francisco, 100,000 souls would be won for the Gospel.

Today...

From that point to this moment in our history, the Assemblies of God of Northern California/Nevada has experienced the growing power found through the Holy Spirit. Today, our district is composed of 450 churches reporting over 142,051 adherents in worship weekly.¹ What began as a vision for 100,000 souls 100 years ago has been multiplied exponentially, not through the vision of a man, but rather, the power of the Holy Spirit.

When I became a Senior Pastor, I began to pray for vision, strategy and a paradigm to build His church. In study one afternoon, I remember reading through Acts chapter one. When I hit verse eight, I saw something that I had not realized prior. The strategy for our church was outlined in this one very packed verse. I read Acts 1:8 as seven key areas that were needed for our church. They are summarized as: receiving power, the Holy Spirit upon us, becoming witnesses, Jerusalem (home), all Judea (region), Samaria (the outcast) and, a Global vision.

For nearly six years, this has been our journey as a church. The first four years were focused upon receiving power, the Holy Spirit upon us and becoming witnesses. Our journey established a focus where the church had to be healthy internally before we could reach externally. The last two years has begun the process of reaching our Jerusalem which we have labeled as a one-mile radius from our property. We have labeled Judea as the region surrounding Jerusalem. For us, the urban/metro population for the city of Sacramento is between 1.44 - 2.6 million residents. This is obviously impossible for one church alone but possible through the uniting power of the Holy Spirit reaching out to Bible believing, Gospel preaching churches beyond denominational borders within this region.

Samaria for us has become the hardest target for our church. This outcast group is not about a culture as much as it is about any group we label different. For Trinity, the homeless population surrounding our property is significant. For us, the depressed neighborhoods surrounding our church have morphed what used to be a decent suburb into an urban atmosphere. The socio-economic differences that separated those who drove over 10 miles to attend our Sunday service from those that live within 100 yards from our property were astonishing. Through the power of the Holy Spirit, we have seen the homeless population fed every week, our adopt-a-block ministries established within three of the four corners we desire to target. Our global target is connected to the strength of the Assemblies of God World and US Missions ministries.

Forever (Tomorrow)...

As we celebrate our first 100 years, we look towards what is ahead as a movement. The changes in culture, advances in technology and the next generation of leaders are emerging into new leadership roles in ministry. While I am filled with hope and excitement for what is ahead, none of it will adequately meet the needs of society without the authentic changing power of the Holy Spirit. Pastors, we need to pray for a move of His Spirit today that will propel us into our Tomorrow.

¹ 2017 ACMR report for NCNAG

APOSTLESHIP - PLANTING/PARENT AFFILIATED CHURCHES

Ray Hudson | Executive Pastor | New Life Church, Alamo, CA

Yesterday...

As you search throughout Scripture, the words “church planting,” are not used or discussed. You do however hear Jesus speaking about the church that has not yet been. Matthew 16:18-19 “¹⁸ Now I say to you that you are Peter (which means ‘rock’), and upon this rock I will build my church, and all the powers of hell will not conquer it. ¹⁹ And I will give you the keys of the Kingdom of Heaven. Whatever you forbid on earth will be forbidden in heaven, and whatever you permit on earth will be permitted in heaven.” Jesus was at the start of His earthly church being built and He built the first core team.

As we continue to look throughout Scripture, we see the process that was used to start the first churches. The beginning church planters were Jesus apostles and there was a pattern that they followed to plant churches.

- Prayed, fasted, and guided by the Holy Spirit ([Acts 13:1-2, 4](#); [16:6, 9](#))
- Sent out by another group of believers ([Acts 13:3](#))
- Joined with other believers (formed teams) to start churches ([Acts 13:2](#); [15:36-16:3](#))
- Teams travel to unreached groups ([Acts 13:4](#), [Romans 15:20](#))
- Proclamation of the Word of God, using the Bible (Acts 13:5-ff; 14:21)
- Perform miracles so people believe ([Acts 13:9-12](#); [14:8-9](#))
- People believe in Jesus ([Acts 13:48](#))
- God’s Word spreads ([Acts 13:49](#))
- Travel to a new places and plant churches ([Acts 14:1, 6, 20](#))
- Continued development, care, and encouragement to disciples ([Acts 14:22](#))
- Appointment of leaders in each church ([Acts 14:23](#))
- Return to sending church reporting the wins ([Acts 14:26-28](#))

From the early church, we see the beginning of the NCN District in 1919 with 12 churches. At the 1921 District Council held in San Francisco, Glad Tidings Bible Institute (GTBI) had its first graduating class. There were 19 churches in affiliation including, Chico, Exeter, Eureka, Hayward (Hispanic), Kingsburg, Live Oak, Dunsmuir, Oakland, Oakland (Hispanic), Santa Rosa, San Jose, Oroville, Turlock, San Francisco, San Francisco (Hispanic), Willits, Stockton, San Miguel, and Beulah Heights-Oakland. In 1926, rural churches and outreaches to Native American reservations began. Churches sprang up in Fallon, Elko, Battle Mountain, and in Southern Nevada with Las Vegas being the center.

Though the war years proved difficult, growth continued with churches and ministries being added in both Northern California and Nevada. The first 25 years of our history ended with churches and ministers scattered from the Oregon border to just above Fresno, and from San Francisco to Elko, Nevada. Then by 1969, Chief Hap McPherson from Sacramento influenced

Native Americans across the country and other works began in the 60's among Samoans, Tongans, Filipino's in San Jose and the Greek populations in Oakland.

Through wonderful people like Gladys Rushing and Maurice Caudill, churches were planted in Nevada. The beginning of the Assemblies of God's official Decade of Harvest was in 1989. One of the first churches planted was in Rancho Madera, with Paul Krob as the pastor. In addition, there were significant churches in our District planted during this season. Destiny Christian Church, formerly Sunset Christian Center in Rocklin, Harvest Church in Elk Grove, Crosswinds Assembly of God in Sparks, Nevada, International Church Las Vegas, formerly West Valley Assembly. From 1990 to 2000 we see the growth of mega churches, from 1990-2000. Our district had over 12 churches, which averaged 1,000 or more in attendance.

Today...

What is going on with the Church in America?

The National Black Robe Regiment commissioned the Barna Group for a study related to the growth and decline of the church. They reported that, "...There is an ongoing silent migration away from the church of an estimated 3,500 individuals each and every day. A 2014 study indicated that over 1.2 million people will leave the church in the next year. In 2015, it is estimated that over 10,000 churches will close their doors. This has led to a growing host of Christians who no longer have a place to connect with other believers. In fact, The Barna Group reports that the average size of a church congregation in America is just 89 adults. That means for each church door that closes, almost 100 people are left without a spiritual home.²"

While these stats seem alarming, there is another side to church culture. According to the Reach Right Studios³...

- **Churches Are Growing And Declining** - One of the most depressing church statistics you often see is how many churches are declining. Thom Rainer performed a study with 1,000 churches and the 80% number you often see is wrong. The study found that 65% of churches are in decline or plateauing. However, 35% are growing, which should give you hope.
- **Billions Of Christians** - While all the talk of church decline might make you want to stop looking at church statistics, it's important to note that Christians make up 2.3 billion people around the world. With numbers this large, the church isn't going away anytime soon. It does mean that everyone will have to work together to continue helping younger generations find their way.
- **Churches Need To Merge** - Far too often, churches are built due to petty disagreements. This leads to numerous small churches with few members. In fact, 61% of small churches have fewer than 100 members. That's not enough to support the cost of maintaining a church. Even the Catholic church has experienced a 69% decline since 1965. This resulted in both closures and mergers. It's a sign that for smaller churches to survive, it may be time to consider merging versus closing.

² <http://nationalblackroberegiment.com/shocking-statistics-church-decline/#>

³ <https://reachrightstudios.com/10-church-statistics-need-know-2018/>

- **Social Media Growth** - Is your church on social media? If not, now's the time to start. Worldwide, there were 2.46 billion social media users in 2017. That number is expected to grow to 2.62 billion in 2018. Social media gives you the chance to reach billions. Think of how many people might see a shared post or watch an engaging video from your church. A single post could be enough to engage someone who's questioning their faith or hasn't even thought about church before.

At the 2009 General Council in Orlando, Florida, a resolution was passed that would make a big difference in the church-planting world. This resolution empowers local General Council churches to expand their ministry by establishing new worshiping communities, known as Parent Affiliated Churches (PAC), with a congregational life that is distinct from the parent congregation.

Parent Affiliated Churches have previously been known as satellites, extension campuses, sites, and video venues, among other names. PAC's accommodate a great diversity of methodologies for expanding ministry to bring the gospel to people far from God.

Forever (Tomorrow)...

The future of church planting cannot be dependent on the district but can be supported by the district. We see in the early church, there were always sending churches. These are churches that support, raised up, funded and sent leaders this is the future of church planting. These would be considered Parent Affiliated Churches (PAC).

The building of **Market-Place Leaders** is so important for the future of church planting. We have people in our churches currently who God has placed in careers and area of influences for 40 plus hours. I have to believe that God has placed them there for a reason and there is a purpose for them to be there. Ephesians 4:11-12 says, "Now these are the gifts Christ gave to the church: the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, and the pastors and teachers. ¹² Their responsibility is to equip God's people to do his work and build up the church, the body of Christ." Equip **LEADERS** to maximize their **INFLUENCE**, develop a heart of **GENOROSITY**, and everyday build God's **KINGDOM!** Imagine when church members who owned businesses looked at their companies as an extension of the church.

The spread of **Market Place Life Groups**, which really are small churches. Life Groups give you the ability to get churches in places we could never go as a local church. However, what if we began to look at them as little church plants and we equipped members of our churches to lead them? Life Groups at workplaces, high schools, and colleges. We would see the spread of the gospel in ways we have never seen it.

Sustainability Church Planting Partnerships, this where churches who are close to death partner with a church that is growing. Many of these churches have buildings that are paid off and so they can die a slow death. But imagine if they were to develop a kingdom mindset to partner with a church that could bring life again. Helping to be the things that sustains and continues the momentum of the church that has the big vision but needs resources and facilities. This would be a kingdom sacrifice/investment and we will need more of these if we want to see our

movement last another 100 years. This also will help with all the churches that are closing every year.

Ways for Churches to Multiply:

Launch A Campus: Launching a campus multiplies the presence of a church in a city. A new campus replicates the DNA of the launching church and functions as one church in multiple locations.

Host A Venue: Hosting a venue multiplies opportunities to reach a single setting for the Gospel. A venue typically meets at the home campus as a new service dedicated to reaching a special population – such as a new service in a different language.

Fund A Dream: Funding a dream multiplies churches by providing critical financial resources for church planters. Churches can use Church Ministry Network matching funds of \$50,000 to help a church plant in the process of pre-launch fundraising. By donating to this cause, churches can play a critical part in church multiplication.

Parent Affiliated Church (PAC) is an extension of an existing General Council Affiliated Church or duly authorized District Council Affiliated Church resulting in a worshipping community distinct from the Parent Church. Parenting a church multiplies churches by simply making more of them. This process involves raising up a church planting team from your home church and sending them out to pioneer a brand-new work for the Kingdom.

Campus Launch Plan: Another way church planting can happen in the local church is by considering a Campus Launch Plan. This allows for growth within the church structure and at the same time reaching unique groups and allowing them to connect in a way that works for them. Some examples are: The addition of a new or ethnic service, adding a service just for young adults or launching an online campus – just to name a few ideas!

MISSIONS

Greg Wendschlag | Senior Pastor | Abundant Life Assembly of God, Cupertino, CA

The word “missions” is really a misnomer when we start a discussion about our Assembly of God heart and heritage. The inaccuracy is found in its plurality. You see, there are not many “missions,” there is one MISSION! There has always been one mission, to seek and to save that which is lost.

The Assemblies of God is all about the mission. Why? Because we are Pentecostal people and Pentecost was and is not about emotional worship or ecstatic speech but about soul winning and the power to be witnesses. We all know Acts 1:8 by heart. That verse is the Pentecostal vision statement. That one statement ties together the Holy Spirit’s work and God’s mission. “You will be witnesses in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria and to the ends of the earth!”

Yesterday...

When revival came to Azusa Street, it came fueled by the Spirit of God that propelled the students in Topeka, Kansas. Those kids wanted to experience the things they saw in the Bible. They wanted to know why the book of Acts seemed like a history lesson and not a present reality. God let them know the fire of God was not a “used to be” but a “here and now” thing. That fire traversed the country setting many ablaze with a resurrected passion for Acts 1:8 living.

One result of the Azusa Street outpouring was the gathering of the “Little Rock 400” who formed our great movement - still smelling like smoke from the Spirit’s fire. They knew what to do because they were compelled! We know that when you are filled with the Holy Spirit you do not speak in tongues and then go back to your everyday life! What you do is what the Spirit filled you for; you go, power-filled to your Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria and to the ends of the earth!

The reason the Assemblies of God has grown from that original 400 to over 65,000,000 in a little over 100 years is not because we are great strategists, motivators or generous givers – which I believe we actually are – it is because of the Spirit and the Spirit will always do what His nature demands. The Holy Spirit’s nature is to GO!

Those early trailblazers ventured out all over the globe spreading the transforming Gospel of Jesus Christ. It was not an easy road as many gave blood and tears for the cause. Nevertheless, they gave gladly because “I surrender all” was their theme song. Among the many were the Winkleman family who went to Samoa, Ralph Williams journeyed to South Central America, Walter Erickson traveled to Peru, Eric Johnson to Africa and W.W. Simpson to China.

The Gospel movement included the youth as well. Just three years after the District formed, The Ambassadors for Christ began under the leadership of future General Superintendent Wesley R. Steelberg who pastored in Stockton, California. Glad Tidings Bible Institute, founded by Robert and Mary Craig, prepared these young missionaries and pastor to go and make disciples. Dozens of young men and women were trained at GTBI including Clarence Ridley, Olga Pitt and Bernard and Antoinette Johnson Sr., parents of Bernard Johnson Jr. whom God used to bring revival to Brazil.

As the Assembly of God grew, it became imperative to create a structure that would support our efforts at home and abroad. The Women’s Missionary Council was formed in 1938 to raise funds for our missionaries. Over the years Speed the Light, (which was created in 1944 by NCN pastor Robert Carrington) BGMC and Light for the Lost also took up the cause to raise money at home to support those abroad.

Years passed and new generations of missionaries took the baton from those before them. In the 50’s and 60’s our churches were preaching the good news, our people were giving their dollars and our students were enrolled in Bible School to be trained before heading to the ends of the earth. Some of these were the Heeterbrees family who started the Assemblies of God in Fiji, James Stewart who traveled to Namibia, Paul and Jewell Seaberg who set out for South America as did Bernhard and Doris Johnson. Many others such as the Lehmans, Pipkins,

Sequeiras, Hines and Hoskins also answered the call. NCN produced national leaders as well sending Loren Triplett, John and Elmer Bueno into General Council ministry.

Missionaries continued to emerge from our District and with them came new ministries that continue to impact their field and the world. Bob and Hazel Hoskins began a Bible distribution ministry called Book of Hope, now One Hope. Jerry and Janice Smith went to Ecuador and now Central Christian Church is one of the largest churches in South America with outreaches that include a large and effective Christian School. Ralph and Francis Hyatt went to Argentina, Eddie and Ruth Washington went to Europe as did Bill and Joanne Williams. Sobhi and Jeri Malek were called to reach Muslims throughout Europe and the Middle East and Donnel and Venda McLean served in Japan. The NCN District became a leader in both the sending of missionaries and World Missions giving in the entire nation.

Today...

Today in a world of approximately 7 billion people, the need for more missionaries and more support for our missionaries is urgent. The population is growing faster than we are sending out workers. We truly need to ask the Lord of the harvest to send out more workers into His fields and we praise God for those that have answered the call both at home and abroad to seek and to save the lost.

As the population grows, it is also changing more rapidly than ever. The more the world changes the more various the needs. God is a creative God and He has inspired many to reach out in unique and effective ways. Ministries like Convoy of Hope founded by Bethany graduate Hal Donaldson is responding to global disasters and feeding 200,000 children a day accompanied by a gospel message to every one of them. One Hope has distributed millions of pieces of literature as Rob Hoskins continues to lead the ministry. Bob and Charlene Padgett started Assist International, working with secular community organizations like Rotary Intl. to provide needed resources for those abroad. Bob's daughter and son in law, Michelle and Ralph Sudfeld now lead the great ministry. These and many others who work building houses, rescuing trafficked girls and boys, providing AIDS prevention, provide mid-wife training in rural areas; minister on high school and college campuses have found inroads into the lives of hurting people.

Whether they were born and raised in Northern Cal/Nevada or came here to train, the imprint of NCN is evident all over the world. Time and space do not allow us to tell the stories of Jeff and Tanya Devoll changing lives by building homes in Baja California, Eddie and Diana Echavarria training ministers in Patagonia, Joy Krajicek rescuing trafficked kids in France or Glen and Paula Davis on Stanford University's campus. We celebrate what God is doing through Rebekah Williams serving in Prague and Gloria Young reaching African immigrants in Germany. Over 100 missionaries are serving around the world from NCN. Joining them are many others serving in organizations like Wycliffe Bible Translators and YWAM.

In closing let me tell my story, the reason why my passion runs deep for the mission of the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

It was January of 1994. I was a 32-year-old pastor and only just scratching the surface of what it meant to lead a family of believers. One afternoon, the church office manager laid before me a yellow legal pad with two columns of numbers written down the front with a line separating them. On the left side was the money we had available to us - only a few hundred dollars. On the right side was a long list of our bills for that month that totaled over a thousand dollars! The money we had was not going to be even close to covering our expenses that month.

I looked up at her and said, "What's this?" she said, "You're the pastor now. What are we going to do?" I did not have a clue what to do. I was the Youth Pastor just six months prior! I never had to deal with this kind of stuff!

I looked down the list and obviously needed to make some decisions on what to cut that month. I looked at the utilities. Nope - we need to keep the lights and power on to have church. Salaries? I know I want to be paid and so does my staff! Workman's Comp? Do not want anyone chasing after us for missing that one. Hmmm... missions. What about the missionaries we support around the world? We are only giving each one \$5 - \$10 per month. How much could that hurt? They probably will not even miss it. I decided to cut our missions support that month. I cut a few more things and slapped myself on the back for a job well done. Until Sunday...

That Sunday after service, I checked in to see what the morning tithes and offerings were. I almost keeled over! What happened? It was as if someone turned off the income faucet on us! It was an all-time low offering that came in that day. I was nervous about it but thought to myself, "It's just a post-Christmas low. We will bounce back strong next week."

The following Sunday it happened again! Crazy low offering! What is going on? I was nervous now but rationalized in my mind, "Our attendance has been good. The same people that have given faithfully for months are still here and will make up for it. We're good."

The next Sunday came and you guessed it! A third consecutive Sunday of really low tithes and offerings! Are you kidding me?! We were in real trouble now. If we were behind after I made the expense cuts we were REALLY behind now. I was staring major decisions right in the face!

I was desperate and finally found some pastoral wisdom; I decided I had better find out from God what was going on. I went to prayer about our dire needs, asking the Lord to show me what to do because I was at a total loss. It did not take long for the Lord to speak very clearly to me. I do not know how God talks to other people but He talks to me in a real direct way. There are not any thee's and thou's or a thunderous voice that sounds like James Earl Jones. He just talks. As I knelt in my office asking the Lord to help me figure out what was going on with our finances, the Lord said, "Well, what did you expect?" In my very holy talking to God voice I replied, "Huh?" He said, "What did you expect?" I said, "Lord what do you mean?" He said, "You cut my heart! You cut missions. How do you expect me to bless the church when the leader cuts my heart by cutting missions?" It was about a 15-second conversation that changed my life and the life of our church forever.

I began to weep and I asked the Lord to forgive me. He did. We had a Board meeting that Saturday morning. When the leaders asked what was going on with the giving I confessed to them (in a real Jonah moment) what I had done and what the Lord had said to me. They were very gracious and did not fire me but made it clear that we needed a plan. I had one.

I told them, "If God's heart is missions then we need to make sure His heart becomes a priority above all things in our church. We are going to restore the missionary support and we are going to triple it!" They looked at me as if to say, "You're out of your missions giving mind!" I told them that we were no longer going to support our missionaries out of the general fund, which is the regular tithes and offerings, but we were going to have a missions conference and we would ask the people to respond to God's heart of reaching people with the Gospel around the world. They were Godly men and agreed that this was a good plan.

Our first mission conference was at the end of that February, just a few weeks after the financial disaster of January. I invited a missionary guest to speak and we challenged the people to make a monthly pledge for one year. It was amazing! Our people responded with wonderful generosity tripling our previous monthly support from \$600 to \$1,800 per month! In all honesty, I am not sure I would call it a miracle. I think we just learned a lesson in God's economy.

In the twenty-four years since the first mission conference, God has blessed as our missions support has increased every year. There have been down years in the local economy and there have been years when the attendance dipped, but every year we have given more to missions than the previous year. All over the world, we have built churches, Bible schools, pastors homes and day care centers. We have purchased land for the ministry, dug freshwater wells and given away thousands of shoes. We have sent dozens of teams both local and overseas to share the Gospel. God's mission has become our heart too!

God has been faithful to His promises! Every year our regular church income has enjoyed wonderful health. Some years have been better than others, but God has kept His promise and we have managed faithfully. When you are generous toward the things that God values, He will make sure you have what you need not only for yourself but also to keep being generous.

In those early years, I dreamed of what it would be like to be able to give \$25,000 a month to our missionaries. Amazingly, we are almost there! In 2017, our pledges surpassed the \$20,000 a month mark! Since that day when God spoke to me, the people of Abundant Life have given almost \$4,000,000 to the mission! This giving is even more remarkable when the size of our congregation is taken into consideration. We are not a big church, but our heart is - because it is God's heart. We continue to remember that reaching lost people is God's heart and God keeps supplying all of our needs! It is God's economy!

Forever (Tomorrow)...

One last thought: we never set a monetary goal from year to year. Instead, our goal is 100% participation. I am still eager to see what God would do if every single "LIFER" was generous toward His mission. What would God do if we were truly unified? We have never reached the

100% goal. Our greatest participation was 71% a couple of years ago. Compared to most churches 71% is unheard of, but we are not comparing to other churches, we are comparing ourselves with the heart of God. I am convinced that if we were truly unified in our giving, we would see things from God that we never would have believed. I do not doubt that in the least. We have already seen things I never thought I would see. God is good all the time!

The mission of God and God's heart are one and the same. We cannot say we hunger for more of Jesus while at the same time ignoring His mission. If we have the heart of God, we will have the mission of God burning inside of us. His mission is people, His kids, the ones He came to seek and to save.

The NCN District has had the heart of the Lord since its inception in the days of the Craig's and continue on to be a leader in our nation; all this in spite of less than 100% of our churches doing anything financial for the mission of God. What could we do if we were truly united behind the heart call of God? How many more missionaries could we send? How many more lives could be saved? How many more people groups could be transformed? "For God so loved the world that He gave...." so must we. Jesus commanded us to "Go!" and we must obey!

THE WORD (LITERACY)

Ray Hudson | Executive Pastor | New Life Church, Alamo, CA

Yesterday...

38% believed the Bible was the literal Word of God...

From the mid-1970s through 1984, close to 40% of Americans considered the Bible the literal word of God, but this has been declining ever since, along with a [shrinking percentage of self-identified Christians](#) in the United States. Meanwhile, the percentage defining the Bible as mere stories has doubled, with much of that change occurring in the past three years. Still, while biblical literalism has waned, the vast majority of Americans - 71% - continue to view the Bible as a holy document, believing it is at least God-inspired if not God's own words.

Within the NCN District, we have led the way in training and teaching people the Word of God. Robert Craig issued a call for meetings in San Francisco to pray, hear gospel preaching and singing and to consider affiliating with this new Pentecostal movement. Glad Tidings in San Francisco also began Glad Tidings Bible Institute to train men and women for ministry and missions work with the stated goal of seeing 100,000 converts. Glad Tidings Bible Institute was a major factor in training and sending many missionaries across the world such as Clarence Ridley, Olga Pitt, and Bernard and Antoinette Johnson, Sr., parents of Bernard Johnson Jr. This foundation was not based upon anything more than a true value rooted in His Word.

Today...

24% of Americans believe the Bible is the literal Word of God...

We have to be on guard against the erosion of biblical values and damage to our beliefs and biblical mindset (Psalm 123:3; Mark 4:19)! "Then we will no longer be infants, tossed back and

forth by the waves, and blown here and there by every wind of teaching and by the cunning and craftiness of men in their deceitful scheming. Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will in all things grow up into him who is the Head, that is, Christ. From him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work. Ephesians 4:14-16"

We have a generation of people who have no desire to read and study God's word. The Bible is losing its importance in the lives of the younger generation. Here are some staggering statistics, 24% believe Bible is literal word of God. Fewer than one in four Americans (24%) now believe the Bible is "the actual word of God, and is to be taken literally, word for word," similar to the 26% who view it as "a book of fables, legends, history and moral precepts recorded by man." This is the first time in Gallup's four-decade trend that biblical literalism has not surpassed biblical skepticism. Meanwhile, about half of Americans - a proportion largely unchanged over the years - fall in the middle, saying the Bible is the inspired word of God but that not all of it should be taken literally⁴.

In the NCN, we have a great history of Bible believing and preaching pastors. However, we are in a Bible illiterate area and our churches and leaders do not know and completely believe the Word. If we are not careful, we will see our churches becoming ones who believe portions of the Bible and not all of it. We have churches who are teaching the knowledge of the word with leadership colleges on church campuses. However, just because we have these college partnerships on our campuses, does not mean people love both God's Word. We are seeing leaders sifting through God's word instead of allowing God's word to sift through them.

Forever (Tomorrow)...

We have to start with teaching our young pastors, missionaries, apostles and evangelist to love the word of God and build a lasting relationship with him. Our leaders do not know and love God's word so they are compromising. 1 Timothy 4:3 "I solemnly urge you in the presence of God and Christ Jesus, who will someday judge the living and the dead when he comes to set up his Kingdom: ² Preach the word of God. Be prepared, whether the time is favorable or not. Patiently correct, rebuke, and encourage your people with good teaching. ³ For a time is coming when people will no longer listen to sound and wholesome teaching. They will follow their own desires and will look for teachers who will tell them whatever their itching ears want to hear. ⁴ They will reject the truth and chase after myths.

When people are intimate and know God, it is because they love His word and spend time with Him. Matthew 7 "Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter into the kingdom of heaven—only the one who does the will of my Father in heaven. ²² On that day, many will say to me, 'Lord, Lord, didn't we prophesy in your name, and in your name cast out demons and do many powerful deeds?' ²³ Then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you. Go away from me, you lawbreakers!'

⁴ <https://news.gallup.com/poll/210704/record-few-americans-believe-bible-literal-word-god.aspx>

Next Steps:

- Church Pastors consistently reading and praying daily
- Bible Colleges putting more focus on devotional time
- District wide call to consistent pursuit of God's word and his presence
- Commissioning pastors to be teachers in public school systems
- Commissioning pastors to work at secular university (Religious Studies, Theology and Administration)
- Pastors putting Chi Alpha Missionaries as Full Time Staff Members
- Commissioning pastors to be City, State Reps, Governors and Mayors
- Better equipping of church members in the area of Word of God as we are becoming a Bible illiterate nation.

This has to start with our leaders who will declare, we do more than pray and read God's Word. However, we will do nothing until we start with that. The call to get back to God's Word and prayer has to start with us as the leaders, pastors and staff members of churches.

TRAINING

Abe Daniel | Senior Pastor | Trinity Life Center, Sacramento, CA

The theme of training is at the very core of our foundation as the Northern California/Nevada Assemblies of God. When researching our archives, we see that it was not the District that was established first, but rather, a church that began a Bible Institute.

Yesterday...

It is impossible to look back upon our history without addressing the theme of training and education. Robert and Mary Craig were married in 1913 and both dove in deeper to the vision of the Mission for souls to be saved. "Mary was passionate about street ministry and was known for her prowess in separating a liquor bottle from the person she was trying to win to Jesus. After the conversion of a man who had been a spiritualist for over 25 years, Mary answered God's instruction to "Feed him the Word," and started a new converts class which met every Sunday."⁵ What began as a new converts class meeting in a kitchen during the Sunday School hour began to experience rapid growth. Beginning with a small group of 6, it grew to 18 by October of 1919. By Christmas of 1919, there were 100 enrolled. While Robert Craig continued his leadership efforts on the church, he was labeled as the Superintendent of the school while the true "founder" of Glad Tidings Bible Institute is listed as his wife, Mary Craig.⁶

The first class graduated in 1921. Of this class of 12, 6 became missionaries. Within the first 20 years, more than 1,700 students attended with 816 beginning ministry around the globe. It is interesting to note that according to our Bethany records, transcripts did not begin until the early 1950's. From the 1950's to the close of Bethany University in 2011, there have been over 17,000

⁵ http://ifphc.org/Uploads/Heritage/2012_07.pdf

⁶ 1938 Tidings Yearbook

students produced by this ministry. It is fair to say that nearly 20,000 students attended Glad Tidings Bible Institute, Bethany Bible College, Bethany College or Bethany University in the 92-year history of this ministry. The God-sized vision of Robert Craig's "100,000 souls won for the kingdom" has been accomplished multiple times throughout the generations of leaders produced throughout these 100 years.

Today...

As we fast forward through the decades, we saw the beginning of Berean School of the Bible in the late 1940's and the birth of Church Bible Based Institutions throughout our District. The Berean courses became the premier adult education program for credentialing which still produces the significant numbers of ministers to this day. The emerging of the Church Bible Based Institutions began to shift our district's training efforts from a central/singular institution to multiple local options for future ministers to consider. Some of the churches that began their own training institutions included: Christian Life Center, Santa Rosa, CA (Genesis Training Center); Capital Christian Center, Sacramento, CA (Capital Bible Institute/College); Trinity Life Center, Sacramento, CA (Trinity School of the Bible/Trinity Life Bible College) and Calvary Temple, known today as The House, Modesto, CA (Global Bible Institute).

The present state of training in the local church and higher education has drastically changed from our 1919 roots. While traditional programs like Sunday School have faded in many of our churches, the heart of discipleship remains as a significant focus. We have seen the shifts take place from a culture of classroom learning to home group study mixed with both discipleship and fellowship. As the focus of traditional discipleship has and continues to morph today, we have also seen the shift in educational options for the next generation with ministry preparation. At the conclusion of the 1980's into the beginning of the early 1990's, the start of church internships and Master's Commissions emerged into our culture. Both the need and desire of the local church to equip students for ministry within the context of their settings changed the educational structure for many of our churches within Northern California/Nevada. The educational platforms varied from church to church ranging from Berean study centers to university partnerships. The result equaled a multiplied effort to see leaders mobilized into ministry.

When I became the District Youth Director (DYD) for our District in 2005, I began to develop a passion related to the mobilization of another generation into full-time ministry. My history in pastoral ministry included a church-based internship targeting students with leadership desires. It was always humbling to see a few of them answer a call to become a pastor or missionary, many of which are still serving throughout the world today. However, as a DYD, I began to see a need - churches who could not afford a full-time pastoral staff member on one hand and on the other, an up and coming generation desiring to lead. The void in our leadership pipeline for another generation to begin serving was not as easily available. In 2007, I received the approval of District Superintendent James Braddy and our Executive Presbytery to begin Pathway Apprenticeship. The goal was to take the graduates of Bible Colleges, Universities and/or approved internships and launch the next generation of pastors, missionaries and evangelists

into full-time ministry. From 2008 to my resignation from this role in 2013, Pathway launched 72 leaders into ministry during what would later be labeled as the worst economical setting since the Great Depression. The God moment we were able to be a part of facilitated the needs of a local church and both the practical and educational training of students. In 2018, Trinity Life Center in Sacramento, CA relaunched Pathway as a resource to serve our churches and mobilize another generation!

Forever (Tomorrow)...

As we look to the future, we see our days brighter than our past. One of the hardest chapters for our District included the closure of Bethany University in 2011. A natural concern became the question of where we would find our future pastors, missionaries and evangelists. What has transpired since has been a true testimony of God's faithfulness and provision. In the last three years, Northern California/Nevada District of the Assemblies of God has experienced a 29% increase in credentials. Since 2015, we have seen a record number of leaders receive and or advance their credentials totaling 421. In December of 2018, the Northern California/Nevada Assemblies of God and S.U.M. Bible College and Theological Seminary began an official partnership to equip and empower ministers to be instruments of change in their communities.

The grassroot efforts of local church ministry has caused a surging of Church Based Bible Institutions, Berean Study Centers, University cohorts hosted within local churches and much more. The momentum we are seeing within this area of training is not just focused on a theological foundation or the practical applications any longer but a blending of the two as one. Ministers leading educational efforts within Northern California/Nevada churches are also committed to minimizing educational debt loads preventing students from engaging in full-time vocational ministry. We celebrate the action of our District with the establishment of endowments for ministerial scholarships and the efforts of SUM Bible College and Theological Seminaries as they have all worked to minimize debt for the next generation of ministers. The future of ministry training and preparation is an essential part of moving ahead but not limited any longer to a traditional approach.

SACRIFICE

Ezy Ulbarri | Lead Pastor | New Life Assembly, Corning, CA

Yesterday...

The obvious sacrifice that the early Pentecostal church had was seeking after the "Bible evidence" of the Spirit baptism. Many traveled from around the country to one of the main focal points in the emerging Pentecostal movement at the Azusa Street Revival. Many men and women of God who were already grounded in their faith had sought after more of what God had in store for them. Many who experienced this Bible evidence (later called "initial evidence") of Spirit baptism were no longer accepted in their respective churches. In addition, many people came to a saving knowledge of Jesus Christ during this movement and were not embraced by the traditional churches of the time.

It is well known that the Assemblies of God was established as a missions sending agency, not necessarily a denomination. There are stories of missionaries who felt a calling to certain area of the world. They would purchase a one-way ticket and pack their worldly belonging in a casket, knowing full well that the next time they would come back to the United States it would be in that same casket.

The zeal they had for spreading the Gospel was noble and brave. Some of these early missionaries had no idea of the language or customs. Some were welcomed and became very successful while others faced persecution, disease and/or death.

Other Pentecostals in the inception of our denomination faced similar persecution. They were not accepted in the Christian community. Some returned from Azusa Street and brought their newfound gift to their local church only to be ostracized, persecuted and kick-out of their congregation. This led to the start of newly formed Pentecostal churches.

The sacrifice of these early churches having to come together and redevelop a new church that would embrace their Pentecostal beliefs were difficult to say the least. They faced persecution from mainline churches and the secular public in general.

The calling that many of these pastors and missionaries had were so passionate that they knew that the sacrifice would be great however they could not deny the calling of the Lord and the gift of the Holy Spirit in their life. This left many of them being disowned from family and ostracized from their friends and community. Nevertheless, the passion that many of these men and women had to overcome these obstacles was second to none. They faced the persecution and many worked bi-vocationally spending much of their own money to keep the church going.

Many of these men and women sacrificed everything for the work of the Lord. Right or wrong, they felt they were called to bring the Gospel message to all. They help establish a strong foundation that we have been able to build on.

Today...

Today, there is a great need we have for a new generation to accept the ministerial call as our leaders of yesterday have modeled. As listed in the "Training" chapter above, the traditional educational structures have changed, giving options for generations to choose multiple learning platforms, reducing debt loads and preventing obstacles for ministers to begin the pursuit of His call.

There are many people today, young and old, who are called to the ministry and have to deal with the fact of ministry vs. profession. With the technology and media that we have today, we have the ability to see many "successful" ministries on television, internet, etc. and this is what we define as our goals.

Northern California/Nevada Assemblies of God celebrates the increase we have seen in our weekly membership with an average of 157 as well as a weekly adherent average of 192.

Knowing that ministry is not a career but a calling (as our forefathers have modeled) requires ministers today to evaluate deeper motives. Are we called to this church and community because the salary is good and benefits are accommodating? Or – on the other hand - are we called to this area because God has sent us much like He sent the ministers 100 years ago to establish a presence of His Spirit and Dunamis power within the community we have been placed in?

The majority of the ministers and missionaries of old truly lived by faith and did not consider what they were doing as a profession but a deep and passionate calling that could not be ignored. There are still men and women of God that have that passion but are overlooked because of the megachurch model that we have gravitated to.

The unsung heroes of our fellowship especially in our district are the men and women who, despite all that comes their way, continue to stay faithful within their calling. They keep the church going, knowing that for some of those communities, their church is the only place where one can openly practice their Pentecostal beliefs through worship, prayer and word.

In our district, we have key areas that have become well known for their high percentage of “dechurched” and/or “unchurched” communities. This has resulted in a decline of attendance in our churches and has resulted in some simply closing the door forever. These facts have discouraged many from entering or staying in the ministry.

What we are also seeing take place currently is a number of “retired” pastors who dedicated their lives and sacrificed so much for the calling, living longer than they thought they would and finding themselves not able to continue with the rigors of overseeing a church in this day and age. Some of these heroes of the faith truly did live by faith all their lives and now they find themselves living in poverty or below the poverty line. We know and understand that our reward is in heaven but their current state of well-being is less than ideal.

Forever (Tomorrow)...

The fact remains that God’s light shines the brightest in the darkest places. If ever we need a group of men and women to accept the calling of God on their lives and live out their calling to preach this Gospel no matter what the sacrifice, the time is now.

We must prepare now for the future of our Pentecostal churches within the reaches of our district to make sure that what we hand over to the next generation is filled with His Dunamis power of the Holy Spirit. That we fix what is broken and encourage our young people to live out a life of faith knowing that what they are about to enter into is not going to be easy.

It is going to be filled with sacrifice. Paul tells the Galatians (chapter 2 verse 20) “I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me.”

We take this mantle knowing that this calling is much more than a profession. What we need to make sure is to communicate with our future ministers of the Gospel is that, even though, they

may not face the same situations that the ministers faced 100 years ago or even what we faced in our own respective ministries. Their calling will be filled with sacrifice and it will not be easy, yet they can take this mantle knowing that the Lord is with them. He has called them and will bless them as He has blessed those that have gone before them.

STEPPING OUT (RISK)

Abby Sterling | Campus Pastor | New Hope Community Church, Santa Cruz, CA

Yesterday...

The Bible is full of men and women stepping out in faith and taking risks for the sake of the Kingdom of God. The Hall of Faith in Hebrews chapter eleven shares many of their stories. Their lives reflect Hebrews 11:1; *“Now faith is confidence in what we hope for and assurance about what we do not see.” (NIV)* I love that we can see this theme of faith, stepping out and willing to take necessary risks in our own fellowship, the Assemblies of God. Men and women who are willing to answer the call in order to see people come to know Christ, be discipled and experience the Baptism of the Holy Spirit.

The Northern California Nevada District began 100 years ago under this banner of faith. Robert Craig led meetings in 1919 in San Francisco calling other churches to pray and consider being a part of a newly formed Pentecostal movement. From that meeting, the Northern California Nevada District began with 12 churches. 100 years later, we have approximately 450 churches, 125,000 adherents and 1,500 credentialed ministers.

Hebrews 11:8 says, *“By faith Abraham, when called to go to a place he would later receive as his inheritance, **obeyed and went, even though he did not know where he was going.**”* God often calls His people to step out into the unknown. HE knows and so we trust in Him as he guides us one-step at a time. The book of Psalms reminds us; His word is a lamp unto my feet and a light unto my path. We do not usually get to see the entire plan mapped out from the start. However, just as Abraham, and others mentioned in Hebrews 11, the founding members of our District said, “let’s go.” “Let’s start somewhere, even if it is twelve churches. Let us be obedient to the call of God, step out in faith, take a risk and see what God does.”

Today...

Imagine the stories of stepping out in faith that have come forth from our District since that first meeting 100 year ago. Most likely, you have personal testimonies of taking a risk and seeing God do amazing things both big and small. I can look back at my life and see those seasons where God called me to walk into the unknown. I certainly was nervous but knew God could be trusted. I remember working at the District Office in 2001-2006. I was an administrative assistant to the District Youth Director. I knew God was calling me to serve as a youth pastor in a local church ministry. When the lease from my apartment was up in the fall of 2006, I knew I could not renew it. I was in a season of preparing myself to go when God opened the right door. I packed up my stuff and planned to camp out at a friend’s house in the meantime. I was driving the U-Haul when I got a God moment call to come minister in Seaside, CA at Monterey Bay Christian Center.

I spent 11 challenging but wonderful years there. It was in Seaside that I met and married my husband Will and had our children, Allison and Liam.

There are individual stories of faith and risk taking that are incredibly inspiring. Ministers who pack up their lives and go to a new church, a new city to plant a church, or even to a different country to serve as missionaries. We are seeing more churches that are corporately stepping out in faith and taking huge risks by planting churches and taking on smaller, struggling District Affiliated churches, entering into a mentor or Parent Affiliated Church (PAC) relationship. God has called some of us to plant new churches. God has called some of us to revitalize older ones that run the risk of closing their doors. These larger churches that step into assist in this endeavor are to be commended. The generosity and oversight of successful ministries are helping to bring life to these churches that have been struggling.

As this report is being written, the Northern California Nevada District has 59 Parent Affiliated Churches. 19 of these are recent church plants that an established church has come along to partner with and assist in the startup. There are also 6 churches in a mentoring agreement with another thriving and healthy church. We are seeing some wonderful fruit come out of these collaborative relationships. Take for instance Re:Church in Rio Vista, pastored by Sean O'Kelley. Re:Church is in a mentoring relationship with Hillside Christian Center in Napa pastored by Eric Daniel. Sean and his wife Amanda began pastoring Re:Church in January of 2014 with a congregation of 3. As of January 2019, Re:Church now runs an average of 120 people, with two Sunday morning services. What an amazing testimony of a strong church, operating in the spirit of generosity and self-sacrifice, taking on a church that is on the brink of closing its doors. Rather than shutting a church down, we now see it revitalized and making a strong impact in their community.

New Hope Community Church in Gilroy, pastored by Malcolm McPhail, has entered into a PAC agreement with two District Affiliated churches in the Coast Counties Section. These two churches, located in Aptos and Santa Cruz, have become additional campuses of New Hope. A long-time attendee of one of these campuses has stated on multiple occasions, *"we don't know how we could have survived if it weren't for New Hope coming and helping and renewing our vision."* New Hope has stepped in and helped breathe life back into these two churches with relationships, direction, resources and even with volunteers. This partnership is giving these two churches a greater opportunity to grow and thrive. When faced with difficult situations, including severe property damage due to a burst pipe, these churches do not have to face them alone. They have help; a key component to the revitalization of our struggling churches.

Forever (Tomorrow)...

As we look to the future of our movement, stepping out in faith will be crucial to the success of the Assemblies of God. The message is always sacred, but the method is certainly not. With the changing of time and culture, we are repeatedly giving the opportunity to take risks in order to see the Kingdom of God advance. For instance, many of our District Affiliated churches struggle due to a high cost of living and changing demographics. My husband and I pastor the New Hope Campus in Santa Cruz which was recently listed as one of the top 10 most expensive places to

live in the world, when considering the median income versus the cost of living. We are able to minister in this area because our church is in a PAC agreement with New Hope Community Church in Gilroy.

Perhaps part of that “stepping out in faith” will be more of our thriving churches partnering with or planting Parent Affiliated churches. We have all said it – “We are better together.” The same could be said of the sister churches in your surrounding areas that you can help resource or who can help resource you. I love what Pastor Eric Daniel of Hillside in Napa said; “The District Affiliated churches in our District are a sleeping giant. They are positioned in towns and cities across our District, strategically placed to usher in revival. Several of them do not contribute to missions, reviving them would revive missions giving. The Holy Spirit has an agenda to revive these churches which is why several are stepping up to pastor them, mentor them and fund them.”

I believe as we listen to and keep in step with the Holy Spirit, the future of our District is bright.

UNITY

Angelo Austria | Lead Pastor | New Life Christian Center, Reno, NV

What is the church’s appropriate respond to a changing world? How do we handle the changing culture that is in front of us? How do we honor the past, be diligent today and prepare for the future?

I believe that the way to respond and handle the changing culture is to never forget where we have come from, understanding the reality of today and a great anticipation about the future in the guidance and leading of the Holy Spirit.

Yesterday...

We had so many individuals that paved the way for us to have what we have today. People that had remarkable visions, people that stepped out in faith, made significant sacrifices and efforts to form and continue the impact and the influence of the Northern California/Nevada District AG.

We cannot forget our yesterday. Our yesterday is the foundation of who we are today. We must honor those that gave so much in the establishment of our district.

Isaac can never forget what his father Abraham did, Jacob can never forget what his father Isaac did, and the twelve tribes of Israel can never forget what their father Jacob did. Each generation must remember that somebody in the past have paved the way for them.

Today...

Joshua 1:5b and 6b, “...As I was with Moses, so I will be with you; I will never leave you nor forsake you. ⁶ Be strong and courageous...”

This is the promise of God to Joshua as a new leader of the people of Israel and this same promise is for us today. God will be with us as He has been with our former leaders.

Our culture is changing dramatically. Many times, changes can be so intimidating and frightening at the same time. In spite of the changes, we must remain faithful to who we are but always willing to embrace the changes that is happening today.

Apostle Paul understood the importance of embracing the changes that were taking place in his time. He wrote: *“Though I am free and belong to no one, I have made myself a slave to everyone, to win as many as possible. ²⁰ To the Jews I became like a Jew, to win the Jews. To those under the law I became like one under the law (though I myself am not under the law), so as to win those under the law. ²¹ To those not having the law I became like one not having the law (though I am not free from God’s law but am under Christ’s law), so as to win those not having the law. ²² To the weak I became weak, to win the weak. I have become all things to all people so that by all possible means I might save some. ²³ I do all this for the sake of the gospel, that I may share in its blessings” (1 Corinthians 9:19-23).*

The focus and the motivation of the apostle Paul was all for ***“the sake of the Gospel.”***

Having an honest evaluation of self and the church we serve is vital. Is the Holy Spirit active and operating in our church? Do I truly trust Him for guidance and direction? Is our church and ministry geared to reach people? Is our church impactful and relevant? Is our church willing to change to reach people? Do we engage and get involve in serving our community?

Relevancy

We need to be relevant but not for relevancy sake. The church is to focus on being and staying relevant but needs to remain true to its doctrinal beliefs. The church can continue to embrace and teach the doctrinal beliefs, remain true to the teachings of Scriptures, and yet be relevant and attractive to our communities. The church should do whatever it takes to bring people into a relationship with Jesus but staying true to the doctrinal beliefs. The church is mandated to do all they can all for the sake of the Gospel.

A true vibrant church has learned to partner with the Holy Spirit in developing a thriving, contagious and irresistible culture. Maybe the answer is not how to be more and stay relevant but for the Church to be on their knees seeking the will of Him who knows all things. It is the work of God to save people, not the Church but partnership must take place between God and the church in reaching people.

Engagement

One of the things we need to do today is to be sure that we engage in every way. Engaging is one of the things that the church is struggling with. People tend to be willfully locked into their way of doing ministry. In so doing, we end up loving the particular way that we do church more than the particular people our church has been called to reach. This does not mean that the mission of the church has changed. The mission is the same in every generation. However, the

methods—the *strategy*—has to change. The goal is not to *attract* people but to start *engaging with* people. Jesus never said ‘attend me.’ He said ‘follow me.’ The only reason a person would follow Jesus (in His day) is because he was either intrigued by who he was and what he did, or because he had come to believe that He was who He said He was. In other words, they were *engaged*. They did not *attend* Jesus. They followed Him.

Engaging is vital especially towards the younger generation. We need to realize how much we could learn from them. The only people that would know how to effectively reach their own generation is them. We need to start getting them involve in the conversations. They have to be given a voice and if not, they will not be there for long. They are looking for a place where they will be valued and given an opportunity. These young generations are valuable in the kingdom of God as much as the older generations. One generation is not more important than the other is. We must remember that God is the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. He is the God of all generations.

One of the things we started doing at our church last year we had been inviting the youth, the young adults and the pastoral team to talk about the message that Sunday. The purpose? We wanted to make sure that the messages are relevant and reaching all generations including the young. We needed to engage with everyone including the younger generation. Everybody must be given an opportunity to have a voice and to honor what they have to say.

Today, we also need to consider the importance of engaging with other churches within our AG Fellowship and other denominations. We are called to be part of the “Church” community. Jesus called all His followers to be united and not divided. We are not meant to isolate. We are called to be about the “Kingdom.” There are opportunities for incredible relationships we could have in our section and city. We all need each other. We need them for relationships.

I had the privileged to be part of that unity. Two years ago, I was invited to be part of Kingdom Partnership 4. Four pastors and churches that has different ethnic background, and cultures, Hispanic, Asian, Caucasian and African-American that became friends and doing ministry together in the city of Reno. Now that is amazing!

Lastly, in regards to the community, we must find a way to engage with them. God placed us in our community not so that we can take a space but so that we can be a light to a dark community. What can we do to serve the community? What are some of the needs and how can we meet it? What can we do to impact and be a part of a change?

God moved our church to the inner-city Reno 7 years ago. God showed us that the kids in our community did not have a safe place to go and God gave us an idea to build a playground. We did not have any money; all we had was the vision and our faith. God provided to the church enough money to purchase the lot and the playground equipment with the partnership of people and many churches.

Diversity

According to our history (our yesterday) ethnic diversity marked the growth of Northern California Nevada in its early years. Ethnic diversity continued to mark the District. It was recorded that nearly 90 ethnic churches registered by 2004 representing 20 different language and cultural groups including Filipino, Chinese, Korean, African, Greek, Southeast Asian, and more. Today, the Assemblies of God is embracing diversity on multiple levels.

This vision of the general and district level must come down to the church level. Our churches today must embrace what God is doing through our Fellowship. Heaven will be multi-ethnic.

Our church, New Life Christian Center understood this. The church started a Filipino church that became multi-ethnic. It was the vision of God for the church and we embraced it and stepped out in faith. Today, New Life is so diverse and we looked like heaven.

Is it possible that God is preparing us today for the future in becoming a multi-ethnic in all our churches? Is it possible that the future of the Assemblies of God we will no longer need to have different fellowships for different ethnicity? Is it possible that there will come a time when a generation will not accept any divisions in our country any longer? The generation today is already asking, "Why do I have to be identified with a specific group?"

Is it possible for all churches to embrace and become multi-ethnic? Apostle John writes: *"After this I looked, and behold, a great multitude that no one could number, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne and before the Lamb..."* Revelation 7:9

Multi-ethnicity is what heaven looks like and today we must be willing to explore this God-idea. All churches in our district should consider reaching our full potential in becoming multi-ethnic.

Gender

While the history and practice of the Assemblies of God appears to demonstrate that God blesses the public ministry of women, debate continues as to the proper role of women in spiritual leadership. We cannot deny the incredible women that God has used for leadership.

Old Testament history includes accounts of strong female leadership in many roles. Miriam was a prophet to Israel during the Exodus, alongside her brothers Moses and Aaron (Exodus 15:20). Deborah, both a prophet and a judge, directed Barak to lead the army of Israel into successful combat against Israel's oppressors (Judges 4 to 5). Huldah, also a prophet, authenticated the scroll of the Law found in the temple and helped spark religious reform in the days of Josiah (2 Kings 22:14–20; 2 Chronicles 34:22–28).

The New Testament also shows that women filled important ministry roles in the Early Church. Tabitha (Dorcas) initiated an effective benevolence ministry (Acts 9:36). Philip's four unmarried daughters were recognized prophets (Acts 21:8,9). Paul singled out two women, Euodia and Syntyche, as "women who have contended at my side in the cause of the gospel, along with Clement and the rest of my fellow workers" (Philippians 4:2,3). Priscilla was another of Paul's

exemplary “fellow workers in Christ Jesus” (Romans 16:3,4). In Romans 16, Paul greets numerous ministry colleagues, a large number of them women. In these greetings, the word Paul uses to speak of the work (*kopiaō*), or labor, of Mary, Tryphena, Tryphosa, and Persis (Romans 16:6,12) is one he uses extensively for the labor of ministry (1 Corinthians 16:16; 1 Thessalonians 5:12; 1 Timothy 5:17). Phoebe, a leader in the church at Cenchrea, was highly commended to the church at Rome by Paul (Romans 16:1,2) and many others. Then we had notable women ministers among the early Pentecostals included Maria B. Woodworth-Etter, Aimee Semple McPherson, Alice Reynolds Flower, Anna Ziese, and Marie Burgess Brown.

These instances of women filling leadership roles in the Bible and in our history should be taken as a divinely approved pattern, not as exceptions to divine decrees. Even a limited number of women with scripturally commended leadership roles affirm that God does indeed call women to spiritual leadership.

Female ministers are continuing to grow in our Fellowship. We must continue to honor their call, embrace their gifts and talents that God has given them and to be given opportunities for ministries. The future of our district is that both genders (male and female) working together as a team for one purpose...for the *“Sake of the Gospel.”*

Size of Churches

At times, pastors of small churches can feel insignificant because of the size of their church. I have fallen into this trap. I felt insignificant for a while and found myself embarrassed for pastoring a small church. However, I have learned throughout the years that God can do incredible things to big churches as well as small churches.

I have known pastors and churches that are considered small but the impact of their ministry in their communities is pretty amazing. Somebody said, “God is not looking for big churches but He is looking for ‘Big People.’” The beauty of the “Church” is that we are all different with different sizes – small, medium and large. Pastors of small churches need to be encouraged and not feel ashamed or embarrassed about the size of their church. We give honor to everyone that is part of the advancing the kingdom of God whether they pastor a small or a large church. We are all important in the kingdom.

Socioeconomics

Everyone matters to God in spite of our socio-economics. Just because one has more does not mean he is more important. No one was created greater or more important than others. We are all the same in God’s eyes. *“There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus (Galatians 3:28). We are all the same, broken and in need of a Savior.*

One of the things we did a few years ago as a church, we created our church DNA and one of them states: *“Unconditional Acceptance” – all people matter to God, the rich and the poor, the healthy and the sick, the altogether and the broken.*

This was a problem in the early church and apostle James dealt with this by writing: *"My brothers, show no partiality as you hold the faith in our Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory. ² For if a man wearing a gold ring and fine clothing comes into your assembly, and a poor man in shabby clothing also comes in, ³ and if you pay attention to the one who wears the fine clothing and say, 'You sit here in a good place,' while you say to the poor man, 'You stand over there,' or, 'Sit down at my feet,' ⁴ have you not then made distinctions among yourselves and become judges with evil thoughts ⁵(James 2:1-5)?*

God loves everyone, it does not matter the status of the person and as a church, and we must come to a place where we unconditionally accept everyone.

Forever (Tomorrow)...

We as ministers must not lose our ability to dream and remain content while in battles that can take on many shapes and forms. Ministry effectiveness is something that requires constant attention. Failure to sustain this can result in a loss of vision for the ministry assignment He has trusted to us. The Scripture is clear: *"Where there is no prophetic vision the people cast off restraint..." (Proverbs 29:18)*

We have to remember that the road has been paved for us and we must honor those people that made great sacrifices so that we can have a brighter future. In return, we must be faithful today and part of today is to have God-given dreams and visions. Our future is important and we must be compelled to prepare ourselves (and those we lead) in what God has in store. So - here's our takeaway, we must engage, willing to learn from others, willing to embrace change and make the necessary changes to reach people for Jesus without compromising with Scriptures, and to be on our knees asking God to show us how to effectively reach the lost. The motivation behind all of these? It is all for the sake of the Gospel.

Remember our yesterday was remarkable, our today can be amazing and our future can look brighter. Be inspired, excited and confident about tomorrow's journey. The future of our district is in the hands of a good God. He is good and faithful!