

# The Report of Your District Superintendent

## *“Some History”*

In December of 1904 a handful of Nazarenes from around the northwest met with General Superintendent Dr. Phineas F. Bresee in Spokane. Together they decided to form a district to support the many new church plants that were springing up. Bresee called his Methodist pastor friend, H.B. Brown, who was living in Seattle and invited him to come be the superintendent of the new denomination's first district. Defining their territory as the states of Washington, Oregon, Idaho, and Montana, the work of Northwest District began. It was said of those early days, “there were no church buildings, no money, no salaries, but we went forward trusting God.” Brown said after coming to meet Bresee and the delegates at the organizational gathering that he returned home to Seattle “to meet all sorts of surprises, criticism and foreboding of frightful things.” His friends and fellow pastors were sure that this new denomination was doomed to fail.

A century later, in July of 2004, while living in a Seattle suburb I received a call from General Superintendent Dr. Paul Cunningham informing me I had been appointed the 16<sup>th</sup> Superintendent of Northwest District. The territory was now defined as Eastern Washington, Northern Idaho, and Northeast Oregon. I came to a district with a century-long history of effective ministry as faithful pastors and laity had seen to the expansion of the work. There were buildings, money, and salaries, but the work was still dependent on trusting God.

As I offer to you my final report, I can testify it has been a great privilege and a personal joy to serve as your Superintendent through the first decade and a half of the second century. The hand of God has been with us, as together, we have written another chapter in the history of Northwest District.

This district has been significant to me my entire life. Born in Pullman with stops in Goldendale and Zillah, my formational years were here. After college and seminary, I returned to pastor Sandpoint and Leavenworth and those two congregations gave shape to my vocational calling. After sixteen years on the Washington Pacific District, pastoring in Kirkland, I returned to this place which has given so much to me.

I have never been a person who wanted to live in the past. My gaze has always been toward a God-shaped future. But I'll confess I have been doing some reflecting. I've been giving thanks to God with a heart full of gratitude for his work in me and through me. I've also spent time being thankful for the people of God who have shared the journey with me. I cannot journey down memory lane without numerous reminders of the significance of the Northwest District.

The story of these years is not mine, it is ours. My constant reminder, to you my pastors and people, has been: “We are called to be God's missional people bringing God's transforming love and grace to every one of our communities.” I've used the language of “missional outposts” to remind us that the church is no longer in the center of the community, we are on the edges. We must be open to God's leading with a mindset that we will need to find new ways to get the Good News out into our communities.

## *“Reflections”*

You know my love of baseball. Keeping stats has been a lifelong hobby of mine. So, I guess it is not unexpected that part of my looking back is to reflect on some of the numbers that represent my time as your DS.

- I have traveled over a quarter million miles in my car. I have attended hundreds of board meetings, reviewing pastors, wrestling with challenges, and 115 times helping congregations find a new pastor to lead them.
- I have worked with all but eleven churches in securing new pastors. Only these pastors have not moved: Stan Christopherson (Bonners Ferry), Don Moore (Colfax), Joe Simmons (Dayton), Curt Blackwill (Lewiston Orchards), Floyd Wilks (Moses Lake), John Hardiman (Quincy), Chad Wilks (Sandpoint), Jim Clifton (Spokane Bethel), Mark Van Bebber (Spokane Pasadena Park), Bob Russell (Yakima New Hope), and Angus Tate and Don Thompson (co-pastors at Yakima Trinity).
- I have enabled 66 women and men to accept their first assignment as a lead pastor.
- I have worked with 19 women who served in lead pastoral roles, twelve of them are in current assignments.
- We have started twelve new churches—Benton City New Beginnings; Ellensburg The River; Granger Harvest; Kennewick Discipulos de Hoy; Kennewick Story Point; Moses Lake Casa de Restauracion Maranata; Othello Agape Love; Pullman Restoration; Richland El Senor es Dios; Spokane First Chin; Walla Walla Valley Cowboy; and Wenatchee The Table.
- Northwest Connect, a compassionate ministry center in Spokane, has been started with ongoing support from three of our Spokane area churches—Bethel, First, and Valley.
- I’ve been working with three areas of our district to develop partnerships. Coeur d’Alene, Hayden True North, and Post Falls are engaged in a “Kootenai Connect” initiative. They are developing a discipleship strategy with a heart for planting new works while engaging in compassionate ministry. Wenatchee has been the locale of a partnering between two existing congregations and a new Hispanic church. We are just beginning a triangle of support in North Spokane among Westside, First Church, and Northwest Connect.
- Under the oversight of Lonnie Bullock, 18 of our churches have gone through a revisioning process.
- We have offered strategies to strengthen all our churches. We’ve sought through Celebrating Generations to bring the church together across generational lines to resource and encourage our pastors and laity.
- I’ve worked closely with my pastors through January Conversations, LEAD Retreats, and our Leadership Team Retreats.
- Learning Communities, Cluster Gatherings, District Training Events, along with the excellent work of our auxiliaries—NMI, NYI, and SDMI—have made it possible for God’s people to grow in their relationships and skills.
- We have completed four years of offering “Next Step” grants to help local churches receive district funds to expand ministries and move into their neighborhoods. Ten of our churches have received grants and taken significant steps toward compassion and outreach.
- We have restructured the way we raise up “Ministers in Training.” Moving to a single oversight board, we have provided our MITs with coaches and have added a weekend called Discovery Pointe. This outstanding event provides a deeper level of self-awareness and a growing understanding of how God has created our pastors to serve.
- I have had the privilege of being part of the ordination of 89 who have pursued the call to vocational ministry. Of that number 24 were women. I have handed out 118 first time district licenses and celebrated with 69 pastors who have moved to retirement.

## *“Thankful for Good People”*

One of my observations in coming to this position was the strength of Northwest District leadership, both pastoral and lay. Ministry is all about people and I’ve served shoulder to shoulder with incredible leaders.

- Thirty-one different people have served with me on the District Advisory Board. I am pleased that every year we have had at least one and often two women sitting at the table. You elected our first Hispanic board member last year. We have organized ourselves into teams to broaden the leadership base and prepare future workers for leadership on the district.
- Fifty-three pastors have served on the Board of Ministry.
- A dozen pastors and lay leaders have represented us on the Northwest Nazarene University Board of Trustees.
- I’ve hired and had the privilege of working with two extremely capable and trusted assistants Stacy (Schuster) Rarrick and Joy Lindner. Their work for me and for all of you has been incredibly effective. I could not have made it without them.
- My other office workers have provided specialty work and have done it with great competence: Mitzi Wilkes and Robbie Craker served as administrative assistants; Joyce Chitwood, Kristi Crooks, and Debbie Roth as bookkeepers; Shawn Stevenson and Tim Nyman as IT helpers.
- Lonnie Bullock from NCS has been a true partner with me for most of the journey. He has helped us in a host of ways, guiding churches through revisioning processes; providing 19 Transitional Interim Pastors; offering church health surveys and providing coaching for implementation. He has been a huge resource and help to us all.
- Treasurers—Monte Chitwood and Susan Crum
- Finance Chairs—Neil McKay, Jeff Johnston, Rick Barton, and Rod Emerson
- Legal counsel—Neil McKay and Bill Buckholdt
- NMI Presidents—Earl Carpenter, Jon Vandel, Linda Unseth, Paul Clark, and Chris Clemons
- NYI Presidents—Darrin Million, Jason Johnston, James O’Connell, James Lounsberry, and Billy Buisman
- SDMI Chair—Jim Clifton
- Board of Ministry Chairs—Holland Lewis, Bob Luhn, and Andy Dayton
- Hispanic coordinators—Dana Benscoter and Bob Luhn
- Native American leaders—John and Gerri GrosVenor
- Chaplaincy overseers—Eric Askren and Joel Alsworth
- Cluster coaches—Ron Alexander, Paul Clark, Brent Cobb, Chad Johnson, Bob Luhn, Mike Malmin, Steve Myers, Mike O’Neill, Hal Perkins, Cliff Purcell, Ian Robertson, Eric Stillwell, Jon Vandel, Bill Vaughn, and Chad Wilks
- Pastors and associates—One hundred and eighty-eight men and women have journeyed with me in lead pastoral roles. I’ve had the privilege of knowing and seeking to encourage our countless associates who work with our pastors. You have been on the front line, you are at the place where the work of the church happens. I thank God for every one of you.
- Laity—Our churches are dependent on faithful and fruitful lay leaders. I’m thankful for the men and women, teens and children, who gather across our district to live the Jesus Way and to share the Jesus story. I thank God for every one of you.

## *“Thoughts for the Future”*

Looking back brings gratitude for God’s guiding hand. But let me turn now to look forward. It is usually the heart of my report to talk about another year of life together. But soon you will elect my successor and he or she will take the reins of leadership. But I have three things to say on the way out.

### **Hispanic Work**

First, I am convinced that we are at a tipping point in our Hispanic work. We have open doors to plant more churches across our district. It will take an ethnic coordinator, a praying and generous district, local church leaders who will come together to expand the work in our communities. We can make excuses, or we can make a difference, but we cannot do both. There is so much more to be done in the harvest field and I will pray for the ongoing and unfolding work that lies ahead.

### **Holy Awake**

Second, we need awakened imaginations fueled by holy inspiration. We must seek to thrive and not merely survive. Erwin McManus reminds us, “If we live in the past, we die to our future.” We must come alive to the possibilities God has for what is ahead. These are good days to be in the harvest fields. But our active imaginations must be guided by the work of the Holy Spirit in us and among us.

We come to the present on the shoulders of Nazarenes who across the last 115 years have stayed faithful. Some of their methods can be set aside, but as I read our history again, I have been reminded we need to revive the passion, the sacrifice, and the willingness they had to take risks. An awakened imagination fueled by holy inspiration will lead us down the pathway. I think it might look like this:

- ***Passionate about the lost.*** One more time I’ll implore you to be “High Five Praying People.” It is about focusing on people in your sphere of influence; praying for them regularly; crossing paths with them intentionally; and finding ways to tell your story of the transforming work of Jesus.
- ***Sacrificially investing.*** Our local churches are being stretched. God is calling us to be vibrant and fruitful in our communities. For that to happen it is going to take clarity of vision, laser focus on mission, and wholehearted support with time and resources.
- ***Willing to take risks.*** Ministry in the next decade calls for new approaches to reach into our world. These are not days for retreat but advancement. The church of Jesus Christ is not a Noah’s Ark to save the few of us. It is a life boat sent out with us on board to seek the weary and the drowning. We need to ask new questions. We need to live listening lives. We must hear the Spirit and hear the people the Spirit is calling us to find and to love. May God grant you and your new leader a renewed imagination and God infused inspiration.

### **Praying People**

My third and final thought is to encourage you to continue being a praying people. When I came to this assignment, I left behind a strong prayer-partner ministry that was the heartbeat of my church and my work. I wondered if I could create something like it on a district. I invited anyone who wanted to pray for me to sign up and each month I’ve sent out a prayer map so my partners could pray specifically for me. I cannot say enough for those who have been faithful in this ministry. During late night drives, early morning departures, hard board meetings, tough decisions, discerning moments, losses and disappointments...whenever the load got heavy and the strength was running out, I was reminded of my praying friends. Thank you!

## *“Final Words”*

In my reading of the early days of our district’s history, I noted how often H.D. Brown’s wife was mentioned as a partner with him in the opening of the work. As I reflect on my 15 years of service, I cannot say enough about the role my good wife has played. She married me when I was a youth pastor, supported me through seminary days, and has partnered with me for 41 years of full-time active ministry. Robbie, I love you and thank God for you.

Two passages of Scripture capture my thoughts today.

One is about you: in Philippians 1 we read these words which I echo: ***“I thank my God every time I remember you...it is right for me to feel this way about all of you, since I have you in my heart”*** (vs. 3, 7).

The other is about me: Paul spoke words I can identify with in Acts 20:24: ***“My life is worth nothing to me unless I use it for finishing the work assigned me by the Lord Jesus—the work of telling others the Good News about the wonderful grace of God”*** (NLT).

I'm wrapping up being a Superintendent, but I'm not done being a Good News teller! Thanks for the opportunity to journey with you.

Randall J. Craker  
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