



Current Thoughts

From Dwight's Corner

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On the State of the Region

Often this time of year I am asked to give a "State of the Region" summation, whether formally or informally. These are some of my thoughts.

First, the short report: The state of the Great Rivers Region is GREAT! It is a privilege to serve you. It really pumps me up in my travels to be able to share the great things pastors and churches are doing in this Region. The churches in this Region are committed to faithfully living out God's call to mission and ministry in this time and place.

Now for a little more detail:

The ministerial staff has been at full strength this year. It is a joy to work with all these faithful, gifted ministers as we learn how best to work together and serve as your ministry team. We have been able to continue the strategy of supplementing our ministry to pastors through part-time staff. This year Ed Libby (for Area I) joined Gary Nelsen (Area II) as a staff minister dedicated to contact with pastors. We will announce another addition in Area III shortly. Our goal (resources permitting) is to add a person in each Area. This addition does not replace or undermine the work of Regional Associate Ministers with Area Assignments, it is designed to supplement and extend our service to pastors.

We are completing the new Multipurpose Building at Blackhawk Camp. This not only meets a serious need at the camp, it represents a new way of doing camp capital improvements in the Region. The construction is beautiful and durable. Moreover, it was done with adequate financial resources in hand (thanks to Don Conrod and others) and did not jeopardize the financial health of the Region.

Speaking of buildings, the regional offices will be moving to a new location in the middle of April. We believe this unexpected opportunity had Divine fingerprints all over it. The building will enhance our service to the churches and pastors of the Great Rivers Region.

We are in the midst of reorganization. After six years, the Board of Managers has presented a proposal for discussion and response. We anticipate new Bylaws, etc., to be part of the Annual Meeting in Decatur this year. Reorganization will streamline us and position the Region for the kinds of ministries emerging in the 21st Century.

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I was startled by the response of pastors to my invitation for study groups last year. Six groups of nearly 75 pastors participated in study groups during 2001. The study was built around the book *Church Next*, and was designed to stimulate discussion and thinking about ministry in the 21st Century. These pastors are to be commended for their diligence and concern about ministry in changing times.

We continued our move toward electronic communication with the advent of E-Current. There were speed bumps. And we all had to learn how to do things differently. But the net result has been to expand our communication coverage (now anyone who wants Current can get it), to get information out more quickly, and to reduce our production and mailing costs (by about half).

The Region sent a diplomatic delegation to the annual convention of the Federacion de Asociaciones Bautistas de Costa Rica. Ginny and I were privileged to be part of that delegation of GRR pastors, staff ministers, and spouses which made a whirlwind tour of Baptist work in Costa Rica. While the Region has been involved in work (primarily through the diligent efforts of Dan Vitoe), it was not until two years ago that the Great Rivers Region Board of Managers authorized a formal relationship with the Federacion. This signals a new day, and a natural next step in maturation. We all came back from Costa Rica excited about the prospects for this growing relationship. Incidentally, I (or any of the other delegates) would be pleased to talk with your church or group about what we experienced.

Financially, this was a difficult year for many regions. The Great Rivers Region ended the year in good condition. This was primarily due to an extraordinary America For Christ (AFC) offering. The majority of regional funding comes from your United Mission giving (54% of UM stays in the Region) and America for Christ (about 33% of AFC stays in the Region). While we are not in the "money business," our financial health is an indirect indicator of our regional health. We are gratified that you believe the ministry we do, the services we provide, the events we offer, and the media resources we prepare are worthy of your continued financial support.

Nationally, it is exciting to have Dr. Roy Medley as our new General Secretary. Roy is a good friend. I have enjoyed working with him for several years. He has a vital personal faith, a deep spirituality, and a compassionate pastor's heart. I truly believe he is the right person for this time. He deserves your prayerful support. I encourage you to read his statement *Centered in Christ*, if you have not already done so.

In closing, on behalf of the entire staff of the Great Rivers Region, I thank you for the privilege of serving you. This is an exciting time to be in ministry. And the Great Rivers Region is an exciting place. There is no place else I would rather be!

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