1 August 2020

Mission Board Report

Church Planting:

The Board has been seriously evaluating the way we have planted churches in the past. Typically, we select a geographic location where there is not a Free Will Baptist Church (there may be dozens of other evangelical churches, but not FWB), and we look for someone to go there to plant a church. We have invested a great deal of time, money, blood, sweat, and tears using this method, but sadly, we do not have much to show for it.

We believe it is time for a change in our approach. It is our belief that a better model is to pray for and partner with someone who is called to plant a church somewhere, and go all in. Where do we find our church planting partners? The logical places to put out the appeal would be our colleges, camps, and churches. But more importantly, we need you to pray with us. Jesus said in Luke 10.2, “*The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few. Therefore, pray earnestly to the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest*.”

Church Health:

As we have been praying about and planning for this new approach to planting churches, one serious challenge keeps coming up: the present state of our churches. In 1996, there were 218 churches in Arkansas. In 2006, there were 209 churches. In 2016, there were 190, a loss of 28 churches in a twenty-year period. Out of those 190 churches remaining, 168 actually reported, and out of those who didn't report, at least some have stopped paying dues. Approximately 13% of the Free Will Baptist churches in our state closed or left the denomination in the twenty-year period between 1996 and 2016, and more have closed since then, likely pushing that percentage above 15%.

In the Church, as in nature, healthy things grow and reproduce, so we want to do what we can to help our pastors and churches take steps to become healthy Great Commission churches. One tool we have made available is a Church Health Self-Assessment. A staff and/or board can use this tool to evaluate and score different elements of the church and give attention to areas of greatest need. We will gladly provide copies of the Church Health Self-Assessment to any church requesting them.

APPLE Fund:

At present, we have no ongoing mission works, and no mission properties requiring funding. The Board would love to have church planters and church plants we could resource, but, unfortunately, we do not. Each year, at the State meeting, this seems to be a source of contention. We hear the argument, “You’re sitting on roughly one million dollars! Why aren’t you doing something with it?” We understand the sentiment. We want to be good stewards of these resources, but the fund was established with a very specific purpose (assist church planters with capital to acquire first church property), and at present, we have nothing that rises to that purpose.

With that in mind, we seek the State’s blessing/approval to access these funds for the purpose of strengthening and expanding the Kingdom of Christ, in Arkansas and beyond, in the following ways:

* 1. Pastoral/Church Planting internship program
     1. Paid summer internships for young men called to ministry and committed to church planting/mission work
     2. Work with Randall and Welch to make Arkansas ministry internships available
     3. Final internship will be with FWB church planter
  2. Church Planter initial funding program
     1. Limited financial partnership to church planters who have gone through internship, assessment, and approval process with a FWB agency.
     2. Not limited to planting church within the State
     3. Percentage of mission church tithes/offerings will go back into APPLE Fund
     4. If a church closes, or ceases to affiliate with NAFWB, the funding provided by APPLE Fund is repaid from divestment proceeds (this will be contractually obligated)
  3. Healthy Pastor/Church Funding
     1. REFRESH Program (NAFWB Church revitalization and coaching program) or other assessment and revitalization efforts
     2. Percentage of church tithes/offerings will go back into APPLE Fund (if a church benefits from APPLE Fund, it is only right they “pay it forward”)

Mission Director:

We have operated without a Director since Don Matchett left for a role with IM, but we feel a new direction in church planting, as well managing APPLE fund for internships and church/pastor revitalization, will necessitate at least a part-time director with skills/education/passion for church planting/missions AND revitalization. Our budget proposal reflects the need for that position.

ACTS 1:8 Funding:

Our old process of budgeting for ACTS 1:8 was to take missionary budgets and, based on their ties to Arkansas, adopt either 50% or 25% partnership, add it up and make that our annual goal. To our knowledge, we never met those goal. Last year, we were roughly $55,000 short of the goal; the year before, $68,000 under. The good news is, all ACTS 1:8 missionaries are, at the time this report was written, fully funded. More churches seem be directing giving to certain missionary partners, as opposed to funding state plans, since IM changed back to designated giving model.

With that, we adopted a new process for our ACTS 1:8 budget. We averaged what we have actually received in ACTS 1:8 receipts for the last three years (about $411,000 per year), added 6% (bringing total to $435,000), and split it up amongst our missionary partners. Instead of partnering at 50% and 25% , we now are committing at 38% and 16% of each missionary’s total budget, depending on their ties to the state.

That may seem like a big drop in partnership, but we were never funding at the projected 50% and 25% levels anyway. The missionaries I spoke with said they’d much rather know they could count on Arkansas to provide 38% of their budget and get the other 62% from other partners, than count on us providing 50%, secure 50% somewhere else, and consistently come up 12% short. This new budgeting process provides our missionaries with a much better idea of what they can count on from Arkansas. It also gives our State an attainable goal. Rather than constantly hearing that we are coming up tens of thousands of dollars short, we should be able to hit this mark. In the future, we hope to be able to step up our ACTS 1:8.