

If this is the kind of conversation you and your leaders would like to have, contact us.

### Seeing the Forest *continued*

Absolutely. And asking for this kind of help sooner than later keeps more options on the table.

So what does that kind of help look like? What does it entail?

To say that there is a "formula" for this kind of work would be rather misleading. However, there are some typical elements and some are found in the assessment work. These elements include looking at recent history in terms of attendance, giving, and kinds of ministries the congregation has been involved in. However, the more essential part of the work is face-to-face, *prayerful* discussion about what the congregation and its pastor and leaders believe God is calling them to do and to be.



There are no predetermined decisions, and we urge everyone to participate with a sense of openness to what God wants next for the congregation and the ministry that has been entrusted to it. Everything is put on the table – hopes, fears, frustrations, and expectations. In looking for God's answers and His strength to follow and be obedient, we try to see the forest and our way through it, not just the trees.

If that sounds rather messy and unnerving, that's because it is. But you need to know that some of your sister churches have engaged in such a process, assisted by Region staff and other church leaders. God has blessed their willingness to step out in faith. Arco Community Church in Arco, Idaho, and Immanuel Baptist Church in Spokane, Washington are two of our churches who have stepped out on this path. Arco Community is in rural southern Idaho and Immanuel Baptist is a neighborhood church in northwest Spokane.

Both gathered their history and information about their present situation. They talked honestly and prayed earnestly for what God wanted next of them. Half-time ministry? Pulpit supply and very minimal ministry? Close the ministry and the church? To be sure, these were not "fun" discussions. People's patience with each other, was pushed, sometimes to what seemed like a breaking point. But they prayed. And kept praying. And prayed some more.

People from Immanuel Baptist took turns and came to the church and prayed around the clock for an entire weekend. At one point, one of Immanuel's key leaders had such a massive heartache that he wasn't expected to live. Today he is chairing the search committee and traveling— because of prayer. Arco's leaders met for prayer as a council and in two's and three's. Both groups were asking this: Lord, what do YOU want? Lord, would you please lead us together to know what YOU want us to be and do? Both looked their realities square in the face, and both came to the place where they felt God has another

Today, Arco has full-time pastoral leadership in Pastor Mike and Ellen Harris. Immanuel Baptist is looking forward to visiting with possible candidates to lead them in their next chapter of ministry.

Was it an easy path? No. Has everything gone really well? No. In fact, each church has experienced some difficulties along the path. Is everything sweetness and roses? No. There is still difficult work to be done. Can we guarantee similar outcomes for your congregation if you choose to do this kind of work together? No. If we could, it would not be a step of faith in response to God's leading and working in our lives. But it is my sincere belief that the Lord has a work for all of us to do here in the Northwest to bring revival to this part of the country that has not previously happened. I believe God has a particular role for us in the ABC Northwest churches, one that we can play only as we are willing to follow where and how God leads, trusting our personal ideas and dreams to the One who wants more for us that we can imagine for ourselves (Ephesians 3:20). ❖

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601 S. Ross Point Rd  
Post Falls, ID 83854

www.abcnw.org  
abcnw@adelphia.net  
208-777-2733

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# Transformation



## the Northwest Baptist

News from the American Baptist Churches of the Northwest

### TRANSFORMATION RESOURCES

#### Books

*Breaking the Missional Code*  
Ed Stetzer & David Putman

*Kicking Habits: Welcome Relief for Addicted Churches*  
Thomas Bandy

*Unfreezing Moves*  
William Easum

*Power Surge: Six Marks of Discipleship for a Changing Church*  
Michael Ross

*Transitioning: Leading Your Church Through Change*  
Dan Southerland

*Hit the Bullseye and Direct Hit*  
Paul Borden

#### Websites

- www.easumbandy.com
- www.leadnet.org
- www.netresults.org
- www.churchcentral.com
- www.jimcollins.com
- www.congregationalresources.org
- www.thecolumbiapartnership.org



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## Why Church Transformation?

By Dr. Charles Revis, Executive Minister

The vision of ABC-NW is to "grow healthy, mission-focused churches that multiply disciples." This statement, which defines the essential purpose of the Region, is based on several biblical truths:

- 1) Jesus calls His church to move out into the world and make disciples (Matt. 28:19-20, Acts 1:8). This is the church's first priority according to Christ's own command.
- 2) Jesus calls His church to bless people through acts of kindness, promote justice, and communicate the Good News. In this way the world is exposed to the one true, living God and His benefits. This task was first given to Israel, but it failed to be obedient in this essential purpose. (Matt 5:13-16; 25:31-46, 1 Peter 2:9)
- 3) Jesus promised He would build His church and the gates of hell would not halt His church building project. The church is to grow and expand. When it is not growing, something is amiss. (Matt 16:18)
- 4) Jesus is the life of the church, and when the church finds its life in Him, it will be healthy, winsome, and displaying the qualities that make Jesus attractive to the world. The church pursues health. (Matt 15:1-17, Gal 5:22-26, John 17:21, Eph 4:15-16)

Our vision statement clarifies the fundamental purpose and pursuit of the Region, and is grounded in scripture. I am committed to leading our Region to assist every church in our association to pursue the mission of Jesus Christ, to become healthy, so that more people will come to know Jesus Christ as their Savior, and learn how to be life-long followers of Jesus Christ. How will we know that we are making progress towards this vision?

When the churches, on the whole, are multiplying more disciples in ever increasing numbers.

Now, if you take a few moments to evaluate your particular church you may find that it's not so healthy, and it may have little outward focus. No new disciples are being made.

In fact, if truth be told, it may be in decline, and has been for years. If that is the case death is lurking just around the corner. What should be done?

This is where church transformation comes into play, along with leadership, two key Region Landmarks, or strategies, for turning churches around.

If a church is inward focused, unhealthy and failing to make disciples, a change is required. Transformation is needed. I find that most healthy churches are in some stage of transition. They never settle for the status-quo, a static existence. They know that pursuing Christ's mission calls for constant transformation. This is true for the individual follower of Christ, and it's true for a corporate body of followers.

However, unhealthy churches tend to perpetuate the same traditions, methodologies and programs of the past. They are inward focused. They worry about conserving what little they have. They resist efforts to clarify vision. They rebel changes that would help them achieve their God-given mission and purpose.

Paul said something critical that relates to the issue of transformation:

So, if your church is in need of transformation how can the Region help? Here is a summary of the resources your Region offers our churches in order to help them move ahead in church transformation.

### Leadership Learning Communities

The purpose of the LLC is to help our pastors become life-long learners in the area of leadership. In turn pastors are expected to develop leaders in their local churches. Recently Bill Easum said, "The only common denominator to growth is a transformational pastor—one who doesn't mind leading, making the hard decisions and handing off ministries to others." The Region affirms this essential truth, and it is why we are investing heavily in the development of pastors as leaders. No church has experienced transformation without a transformational leader at the helm.

### Church Assessments

The assessment is similar to going to the doctor for a check-up. It evaluates the church's health and identifies strengths and weaknesses. Recommendations are made that if implemented will lead to increased health and effectiveness. The Region has conducted 21 assessments to date with positive results.



### Why Church Transformation continued

"But one thing I do: forgetting what is behind, and straining toward what is ahead, I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus." (Phil 3-14)

Paul always kept the goal to which God had called him squarely in his mind. He never lost sight of it. He pursued it relentlessly. He put behind him past failures, disappointments, and even ministry strategies that were no longer effective. Instead, Paul strained forward, not resting in his accomplishments, for there was more work to be done.

This should be prescriptive for our churches. We should always be straining toward what is ahead, not living in the past. We should press on to win the prize for which God has called His church. There should be a holy restlessness until our task is completed, which it will never be until Christ returns. Transformation is a continuing work.

Transformation begins with disease with the status quo. It moves forward as God's people yearn to be back on mission with Jesus. It is empowered through prayer and reliance on the Holy Spirit. It is motivated by a God-given vision of the future. It is sharpened through a renewed focus on the purposes of Christ for His church. It is attained through sacrificial service and bold witness. I pray that every church in the Region will relentlessly pursue transformation, to the Glory of God, and the expansion of His Kingdom. ❖

## Seeing the Forest In Spite of the Trees

by Patti Duckworth, Associate Executive Minister

In the Lord of the Rings trilogy, there is a scene where some members of the Fellowship of the Ring travel through the land of the Ents, tree-people, in order to get to the Black Gate and Mount Doom so they can return the Ring to the Lake of Fire. The problem is they don't have a map and as they go further and further into the forest, the path gets less clear and the way less obvious. Like so many stories of forest travel, a good map and some outside help would be a great relief to the travelers.

That is a good picture of where churches find themselves. There once was a vision and obedience of some of Jesus' followers to birth a church, but over time the vision has been lost in the struggles and the unexpected obstacles. Soon the choices seem limited.

### about-face, alteration, changeover, metamorphosis, radical change

The existing congregation struggles to conduct ministry. Other churches seem to be doing really well or at least better than we are. It's clear: something needs to be different. But instead of reaching out for help, the church either tries to be like another church or turns more inward, becoming more isolated from the community and their sister churches. Discouragement, tension among longtime friends, frustration, anxiety and an underlying layer of blame and criticism creeps into the church's life. What emerges is a well-intended but false idea that the congregation's energy should be spent on surviving. Surviving replaces what God says could be.

Where that tendency comes from is beyond the scope of this short article. However, it is most important to say clearly and joyfully that in our past, it was expected that a church would turn to sister Baptist churches for advice, guidance and support. Seeking others out for counsel was natural and healthy. Examples abound of churches requesting help from other churches. This wisdom in our past life together is a part of our present and future mission together.

Today the Region, ABC Northwest, is the work of the churches together to promote the ministry of local churches to reach people with the Good News of Jesus and make disciples.

One of the tools available to help churches get more clarity

about their particular vision is an assessment, which helps identify strengths to build on for the near future. (If you'd like more information about this very helpful tool that has been used in over 20 of our churches, see the website [www.abcnw.org](http://www.abcnw.org) and click on "Church Resources.")

But what if your congregation needs to have a painful, even terrifying conversation about (dare it be asked!?)... **staying open?** Is there some way to ask for help with this very heart-rending but needed question without embarrassment, especially jumping to conclusions?

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Ask your pastor about their LLC – what they have learned – what they would like to implement and what transitions your church should make to further the Kingdom of God.



### LLC's – What Are They? by Clint Webb, LLC Coordinator

We've heard a lot recently about **L**eadership **L**earning **C**ommunities – they have become an important part of our Region.

Church transformation experts have found that pastors learn best from peer-to-peer learning linked with coaching and mentoring. Learning how to innovate and adopt from the best practices of growing churches is a proven strategy for starting and revitalizing churches. Dr. Charles Revis initiated our mentoring program four years ago and we are seeing the benefits – with new converts, new members, baptisms, and new church plants.

Pastors of growing churches are conveying their experiences and giving their time to teach others. Pastors of similar size congregations share how new approaches to ministry are causing growth and vitality to our changing world and culture.

The reality is – churches today are beginning to realize that if they are not making innovative transitions they will either barely maintain their present strength, or more often than not, will find themselves in decline. Constant change is vital to the life of a healthy church. How well a church is able to make strategic changes often determines the

course of a church's future. Our pastors are being retrained to equip their congregations to bring about the needed growth. LLCs are helping pastors actually implement and move toward transformation. They are helping them initiate and shepherd the changes as their church transitions from one generation to another. Many of our churches need to make some practical shifts in outreach, worship, small groups, and children's ministries to effectively minister to the lost that matter to God. LLCs are sharpening our understanding of church health and show us new opportunities to take Christ into the world. ❖

### Technology Tip

[www.ebcroundup.blogspot.com](http://www.ebcroundup.blogspot.com)

John Iverson  
Emmanuel Baptist Church  
Roundup, MT



Pastor John wants to see people with different schedules, backgrounds, and levels of Biblical knowledge join together in learning about God's word so that together they can make a difference in their families, personal relationships and community. Since they

can't always get together physically, they're going online to communicate through email studies and a discussion blog. Face-to-face small group opportunities for connection at various times throughout the week are also available. This pastor is encouraging people to give it a try with him, and see if they can "work out the bugs together," grow, and make a difference for God's Kingdom.

### More Resources

#### Ministry Coaching

After an assessment the Region makes available coaches and resources to guide the church as it transitions. These people are also available to any congregation that needs assistance in the pursuit of health and outward focus, and expertise in particular ministries (multiple worship services, small groups, discipleship, externally focused ministries, prayer emphases, accountable leadership governance, starting a new church).

#### Training Events

If you have attended a recent Region gathering you can testify that they have been heavy in training. These are resources the Region makes available to assist churches as they pursue transformation. The Region's promise to you is that every gathering will be strong in training and equipping.

#### Prayer Summits

Church transformation is best conducted in a setting where God's people are intently praying for wisdom, guidance, empowerment and the fresh indwelling of the Holy Spirit. The Region has trained people who can lead a prayer summit in your congregation, or a congregational cluster.

