

ASSEMBLIES OF GOD THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

MINISTRY

RELATIONS

OPPORTUNITIES

PLAN OF IMPROVEMENT FOR
CENTRAL DISTRICT DISTRITO CENTRAL



BY

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INTRODUCTION

There is a crucial need for improvement in our district office. Areas of concern can be a lack of communication, a need for better systems, and a process to connect with our pastors and churches. We have discussed these areas in hopes of creating a system that will improve not only our district but each local church by resourcing and connecting with our ministers. This essay is an effort to develop and work on a plan to execute improvements and also challenge the creative ability of the minister.

Statistics Vs Reality

John Maxwell said, “Growth doesn’t just happen, there has to be a plan.”¹ We intend to get information in your hands that will cause you to think and turn your dreams into a reality. What could that reality look like and how do we discover interesting potentials? The following evidence moves us to be intentional and serious. “Statistics reveal a grim reality according to our ACMR.”² Overall we have 37 years of no growth. Something is wrong when you have a net loss of 48 churches in one year, (2020). Something is wrong when you have a 10% decline in ministers, and no candidates to replace aging pastors. Lastly, something is wrong when twenty of sixty-six districts reported not one new church plant in the past year. This report looks grim until you understand the reality that COVID affected everyone. The new reality is that churches

¹ John C. Maxwell, *The 15 Invaluable Laws of Growth, Live Them and Reach Your Potential*, (John Maxwell Program, 2012), Class Material.

² Assemblies of God Looking Forward Committee, Initial Report to the 2021 General Presbytery, August 2, 2021.

learned how to connect with people online and that new connection not only continues but will not go away anytime soon.

In an attempt to resource the pastor, we have asked thirty of our leaders to write a booklet that will be available on the district website to download. This information will be vital as it will provide the necessary information in common areas of ministry for the pastor of the smaller church and can also serve as a guide to those new in ministry. Of course, nothing will help if the local pastor does not read, share, or try to apply this information with his church. Information and training only work when used.

Creating committees to study crucial issues will not help us grow unless we do at least two things. First, it is my opinion that we need to adopt a mission mentality that we have something to declare. We have a church that can and will transform people's lives. We offer a positive Biblical message that honors Jesus Christ as our hope and savior for every area of challenge in life. We focus on teaching people how to live faithfully in today's changing society.

Moreover, we find or create an avenue to apply the committee's findings. If we believe the Bible, then it must be the foundation for changing the method without compromising the message. A church that is not growing is not reaching the lost. God will help us to reach the lost because he said he would build his church! (Matthew 16:18) A loose interpretation could be, "if you declare that I am the Christ, then I will build your church."

Thinking Business

Certain religious organizations that are growing encourage their pastors to educate themselves with business principles and even enroll in college business courses so as to provide more excellence in their administrative leadership abilities. At the very least, one could view an online podcast that will help to learn how to think for growth and self-improvement.

Development of leadership skills is hard work. Learning to communicate better produces growth and is contagious. Asking your spouse to share with you what she/he may have learned from your sermon might be a good way to evaluate if you are communicating clearly.

We have implemented challenging modifications for our District Presbytery including, creative thinking, safeguarding values, and not walking alone is leadership. We have created a platform in our presbytery meetings of trust and freedom for them to voice their ideas, concerns, and experiences in order to strengthen our district as a whole. This has allowed us an opportunity to refocus on our desire to connect with the local pastor.

“Leadership is not about personality. It’s about behavior.”³ We were struggling until we explained what an acceptable approach for suggestions from the leadership team (board) should look like. We had to adopt a protocol that would create and invite participation. We had to find a way to consider all ideas and suggestions for team evaluation and team ownership.

One of the things that helped most was Barry Corey, president of Biola University. “His video teaching on Church Board Governance gave tremendous insight and guidance.”⁴ We learned that it is the responsibility of every board member to ask the questions “what and why” as it pertains to the vision and goals that we guide ourselves by. This helped to deal with defensive postures and what seemed to be but was not negative behavior. This approach intentionally recognized the experience of everyone and their values. Once the boundaries were in place everyone felt empowered to share their ideas and concerns.

³ James M. Kouzes and Barry Z. Posner, *The Leadership Challenge, How To Make Extraordinary Things Happen in Organizations*, (New Jersey: Hoboken, 2017), 13.

⁴ Barry Corey, president of Biola University, *Board Governance Training Handbook, 2020 Edition Certification Program*, Sandy Rees *The 10 roles and responsibilities of a nonprofit Board of Directors, and Board Training Seminar*, Dr. Jay Herndon, Nor-Cal Nevada District Eng2019. *Live teaching to Superintendents*, 12/3/2021.

A Viable Board

“Supporting the pastor is the primary work of the Deacon.”⁵ When an “Advisory Board” controls the church, there has to be a reason. Most times it is because someone didn’t stay long enough to gain their trust. Leaving soon without raising a Timothy will cause the board to care for the church, even after they get a new pastor. Other factors are poor leadership, discouraged leadership, or leading from an outdated model.

“When a pastor is lifted up, the whole church goes to a new level. When the pastor is pushed down, the church goes with him.”⁶ A church board or a congregation cannot strengthen a pastor without investment. When looking for a pastor, you need to know where he/she might be in experience, education, and their willingness to grow. Language and culture are nothing more than an excuse. Every country or language group has people willing to learn and grow in ability and excel in leading life.

A church advertisement for a new lead pastor sounded so unspiritual until you recognize that they are protecting their investment and the future of the ministry. The candidate would have to fill out an application, give references, send an updated resume, and submit a podcast or video of a live stream. The basic educational requirement is a master’s degree in Divinity and extensive ministerial experience, at least one showing successful longevity in a church as the senior pastor. The candidate's salary would be determined after three interviews and verification of ministry experience. Again, this only sound harsh, but it is only protecting the vision and goals of the ministry.

⁵ Rick DuBose and Mel Surface, *The Church That Works, Democracy vs. Theocracy*, (By Rick DuBose and Mel Surface, 2009), 73.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 75.

Having twenty-seven CDDC churches take the Acts 2 Journey training and seeing very little results shows that our understanding of success principles is weak. If the pastor is not willing to dig in and understand the nuts and bolts of the organizational progress then no programs will help. Every pastor needs to know that his people want to follow and support him, but they also want to trust him for the progress of systems and numerical growth. They want to trust his preaching, his teaching, and his integrity. A pastor has to skillfully live and teach from under a microscope to casting vision with a telescope.

A healthy board meeting is a result of researching your present reality and planning your future. Do not settle for where you are at, then prepare and strategize steps to a better future. Plan what each step will look like, apply the principles you are discovering, and share your heart with your small group called your board. A board meeting is not about you and what you want, although that is important but not the first priority. Take care of the bride of Christ. Pray for her, build her confidence in you, and let her know and understand your commitment to her. She needs to know that she is a priority to you.

Furthermore, let your board help you create the Bylaws and Church Policy Manual. When these are put in place, you can then charter the course and create the vision. Financial reports and questions about them should be a normal part of the Board Meeting and the annual church financial meeting. If hard work is normal for a board, then recreation is a normal part of a good board relationship. Don't be afraid of tough questions; they reveal much about their understanding and your preparation over the topic. When you develop trust with your board they will take care of you in many ways. Learn to meet monthly with a clear agenda about your reality and your future. Keeping a record of your agenda and notes will reveal where you were and your progress. A perfect starting point is to learn to operate under Roberts's Rules of Order.

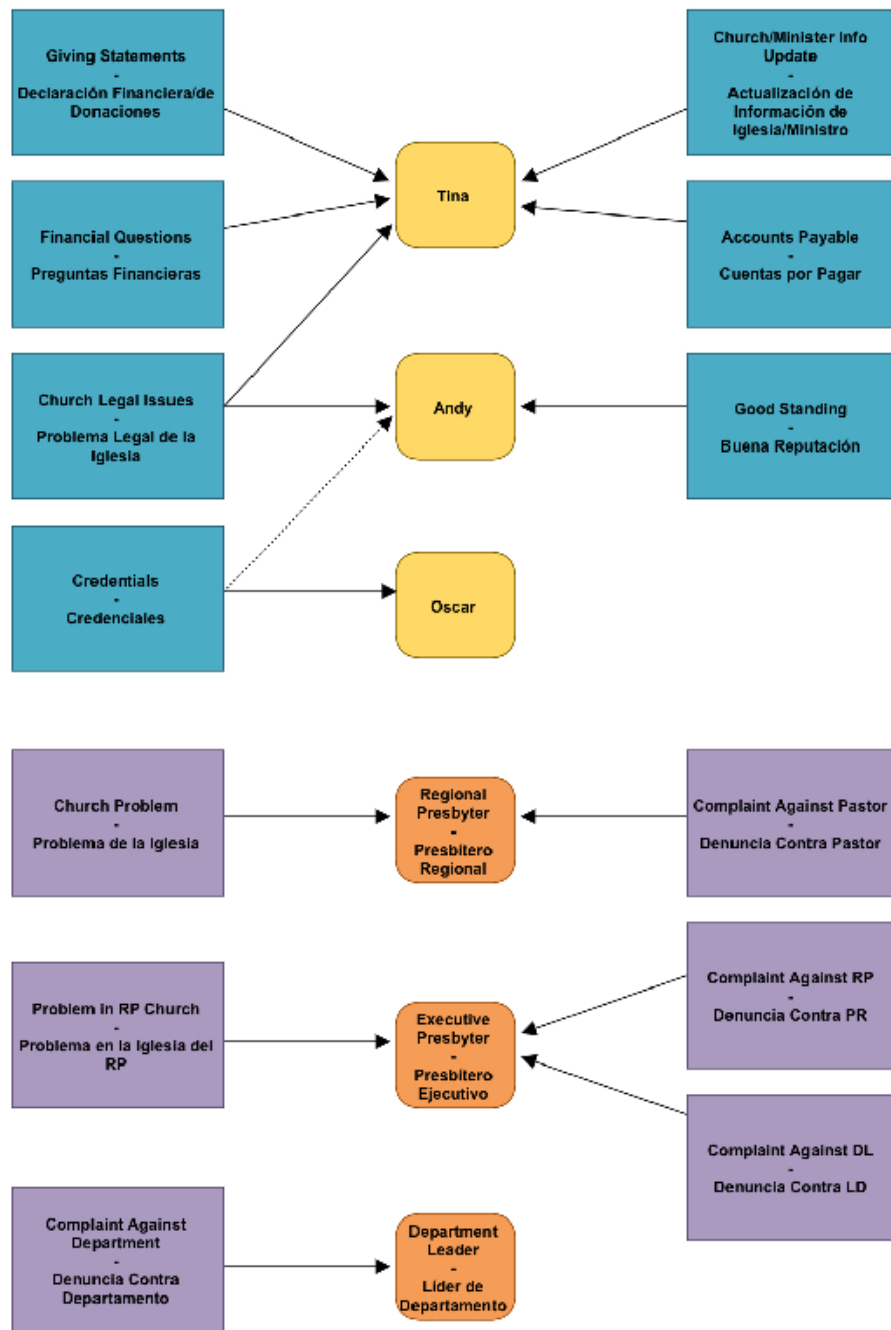
Another Mind Set

Can the district be trusted? The leadership team of the district deals with a unique paradigm. The age of the minister, the language can be all English or all Spanish or somewhat bilingual to totally bilingual. The culture can be American, Americanized, or can be a mix, or completely foreign to the American culture. Many families are enjoying their children or grandchildren marrying someone that might be considered outside of their culture.

Trust is important in all the mix of cultures under our care. This trust fits both sides of the ministry track. Some are planting or taking a church and then disgruntled when they encounter a forced change where they are no longer the pastor. Two scenarios have surfaced. One the pastor has invested time and more into the ministry and expects a lump sum when he leaves it to someone else. If they are undocumented, most times they have not been able to build a retirement and consider this scenario as their retirement. Second, they feel that the district has no authority, responsibility, or right to the church they have planted and invested into. The lack of understanding the American culture hits real hard in this area. This essay should serve to enlighten everyone. The district is here to help.

A positive “Flow Chart.”

Our District Presbytery is being encouraged and empowered for more involvement with the local pastor/minister. Our flow chart information can be reviewed on the CDDC website, (Conflict Booklet) connecting the pastor to a Regional Presbyter for counsel, direction, and oversight. The Regional Presbyter will also help to encourage new credential candidates or those seeking to upgrade, or those who are involved in ministry but do not have a credential. We need this help as the risk factor and influence of this problem is huge.



“Central District Workflow,

Financial/Giving Statement Tina, Financial Questions Tina, Accounts payable Tina, Church/Minister Info Update Tina, Credentials Daniel, Good Standing Andy, Church Legal Issue Andy/Tina, Church Problem - Regional Presbyter, Complaint against Pastor - Regional Presbyter, Church problem with Regional Presbyter - Executive Presbyter, Complaint against Regional Presbyter - Executive Presbyter, Department Complaint - Department Leader, Complaint against Department Leader - Executive Presbyter.”⁷

We are actively training the Regional Presbyters to competently give guidance in times of need to the local churches in his/her area. Encouraging Education and advanced education, reading books together, and just plain personal encouragement are areas where the Regional Presbyter can help connect pastors.

Our pastors and Regional Presbyters can reach and influence the non-credential pastor to enroll in one of the many schools that are in our district. Our Regional Presbyter can also help teach a class with our CSOM (Central District School of Mission) or other institutions. This process is meant to produce a healthy educated pastor and a growing church. Our challenge is unique to the Hispanic church where the first generation could lack in the caliber of education or not be able to communicate in English. Learning to balance the old and the new can be most challenging. Schools that are active within the CDDC district. Most are online, some are offering live night classes.

AGTS offering online, located in Springfield Missouri.

⁷ CDDCAG.org, Conflict Management, Andy Smith, 2022, 7.

LABI College located in La Puente, California, has three Colorado campuses, Edwards, Commerce City, and Greeley.

Christ Mission College located in San Antonio, Texas, has a campus in Albuquerque, New Mexico.

SUM College and Theological Seminary located in Oakland, California, has a Live Stream Campus in Greeley, Colorado.

CSOM is a CDDC school for credentialing purposes, has a campus in Salt Lake City, Utah, and also offers Live Stream teaching.

Pathway is another program offering courses by video for credentialing purposes.

What are the values we are teaching? Are we attacking first-generational problems, so they are not handed down to the second generation? How do we achieve positive turnarounds in such difficult lives? Do we encourage people to dream and to move forward? We invite help to help us evaluate what we do well or to reveal areas where we need to do better. We create ministry opportunities and crossover culture barriers to assimilate American culture into the many cultures within our churches and district approach.

Understanding the issues and encouraging our Regional Presbyters to have open discussions via Zoom or in-person with the pastors in their area is paramount. Not only does this build collaboration, but it also builds trust and leadership authority. Having group meetings where cultural misunderstandings can be confidently discussed will open the door for ideas to be explored, and encouragement of one another will go a long way. It is in these smaller connections that a person can feel valued, thus accepting the influence of the American culture.

A Proactive Approach

There are simple creative ways for our Regional Presbyters to win the trust of the local church and its pastor. We have asked our District Presbyters to connect by zoom at least twice a year. The Regional Presbyter sets a schedule where he/she and the Executive Presbyter can meet and just connect via zoom. We also have scheduled our “Fall Tour” and soon will schedule a “Spring Tour” through the Regional Presbyter, where a full-time District Executive Team Officer will connect with the ministers by region. We will each do three Regions and then exchange those regions in the spring; thus, we will visit each region.

Each of these meetings is to be scheduled through the Regional Presbyter and honor any district leaders present. This is a huge change from the district officer having an exclusive presence in these meetings. This type of visit will allow us to connect with them at the local church, to gather in smaller groups for open discussion, and not just connecting at district events. This is critical for the encouragement of everyone.

We are planning our second minister and spouse retreat where we prepare to speak into areas of the daily life of the minister. We intentionally encourage and look for ways for them to form new connections that produce new friendships and mutual mentorship, young and old connections. We have seen couples connect with new people, sit together, and laugh. “By knowing their constituents, listening to them, and taking their advice, leaders give voice to their constituents feelings.”⁸ As district leaders, we are focused on what is taking place among our ministers and how they are interacting with each other. That is why we bring them together. We are attacking the lack of pastoral care with an optimistic goal in mind.

⁸ James M. Kouzes and Barry Z. Posner, *The Leadership Challenge, How To Make Extraordinary Things Happen in Organizations*, (New Jersey: Hoboken, 2017), 109.

“The atmosphere of the home is the main influence in developing attitudes. This will have a direct effect on marriage and daily homelife.”⁹ Conflict in the home and the church will cause many pastoral kids to leave the church and suffer for many years. Sometimes they never return. “It is impossible to separate the work of the ministry from that of administration.”¹⁰ We are committed to helping our ministers become better at everything, but first a better person and a happier more confident person. Our retreats are for our pastors, period.

Ministry Groups have been developed to forge friendships among like areas throughout our district. We are studying with a committee how to re-develop these groups now. Our focus with the small groups is to connect and form friendships with like-minded people. These connections can be language groups, age groups, and cultural groups. We are studying how to connect younger ministers with others that are walking on the same path. Example. We have young couples with English-only ministries. We are working on connecting them by Zoom every month. Why Zoom? Some live hours apart and in different states. That is our reality. We have this same task with young couples that speak only Spanish. Another effort is to group fellowships among like ministers in the larger city. They are in close proximity to each other and can meet in live meetings regularly. A second consensus is to allow larger groups (two or more small groups) to meet so long as they have smaller groups meeting regularly.

Borrowing from other districts, we have a large list of teaching subjects that address areas of pastoral needs. I alluded to this earlier. We have created five booklets that we give away in our meetings. We promote them as free and downloadable from our district website everywhere

⁹ James E. Hamill, *Pastor to Pastor, Insights From a Lifetime of Experience*, (Springfield: Gospel Publishing House), 25, Summary.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 133.

we gather. We have assigned thirty topics to different leaders throughout our district to research and to write about their personal experiences in this area. We expect that this approach will promote ownership and promotion on their part. We appreciate those who led before us, but it is a new era with many new demands. Empowering these leaders will create a visible team that together will strategize and resource the local minister.

Some areas being addressed are Revitalization, Called, Counseling, Ordination, Deacon Training, Holy Spirit Baptism, Essentials, Retirement, Missions, Parsonage or Buying a Home, Transitions, Presbyterian Training, Prodigal, Ushers, Water Baptism, Women in Ministry, and many more. We also have created a questionnaire for interviewing those desiring to serve in a District Ministry with adults, youth, kids, education, or any specialized ministry within our District Department Ministries. This proved to be necessary as it challenged the old normal and placed boundaries for control. Department Ministries are being challenged for their effectiveness, especially those dealing with children.

The Local Assembly

There are hundreds of conferences all over the country, Women's Conferences, Men's Conferences, Marriage Conferences, Empowerment Conferences, Prophecy Conferences, Leadership Conferences, and much more. They provide little to no help for the local church, especially to resource those smaller churches under fifty people and not able to reach a hundred. We intentionally are giving time in our district events for our people to seek and be filled or just be refreshed with the Holy Spirit. We want them to return home empowered to serve the local church. Every Depart Ministry intentionally makes room for people to experience the in-filling of the Holy Spirit.

“Bigger fixes nothing.”¹¹ The biggest frustration is learning how to manage a larger number of people. One example is a person in charge of a good church that grew from twenty to over sixty. Small numbers but you cannot manage sixty people the same way you manage twenty people. Only a one-on-one connection with other pastors will encourage and help people to grow and learn to manage a growing congregation. This is where our Ministers Groups will form friendships and provide valuable help. Frustration is common and personal before it is public, and it has a direct effect on the pastoral marriage. We need to stop chasing the “bigger” and start learning to change the daily things that can lead to better things. We want you to dream and not let anything destroy your dreams. That is why we intentionally connect with our ministers. That is why we want our ministers to connect with each other.

The Method Can Change

We need a return to the evangelism of the local community. There are new and creative ways to share Christ in the community. As Christians and leaders, we have great influence and the opportunity to share Christ in many ways. We encourage every church to connect with their community through social connections, political opportunities, Health Fairs, and special events to take place in the local church. Social connections can vary such as car shows, carnivals, or just buying ice cream for the neighborhood. Political opportunities serve as a great informational opportunity by connecting with the city government. The church can present itself as a friend and community representative. Praying for the mayor, city council, and police chief, from the pulpit and in person will have a lasting effect. Having the local Health Fair in your facility allows clinics to park their bus in your parking lot as they connect their ministry with people from your community.

¹¹ Karl Vaters, *Small Church Essentials*, (Chicago: Moody Press, 2018), 75.

People love music and having special guest concerts where the gospel can be heard through song connects people with the ministry. When you do these things without focusing on an offering will plant a healthy seed in a visitor's heart. You don't bring people to your church to ask for an offering, you pour into them, and you show that your church cares about them! Utilize your people to drop off pamphlets in your community, it becomes a normal connection and opportunity to later introduce door-to-door evangelism. Free is scary unless you plan it out.

This leads us to another ministry opportunity. Every church can sponsor a community clean-up day, provide one or two roll-offs, and promote a safe day for your church people to volunteer in cleaning up the community. We found out that people joined the church for that day only, just to help another person, especially a neighbor. They were not from our church, but we built a bridge in place of a canyon. These evangelism suggestions were practiced in our small local assembly. It created challenges and drew pharisaical criticism, but we became the church of favor within the community.

When someone in our community experienced the passing of a loved one, or someone is weak from surgery, we learned to take them some food. One such family showed much appreciation when the mom was sick and unable to cook. A hot meal was a tangible way of saying you are not alone. We have to get Jesus into our communities.

I cannot leave the benefit of Acts 2 Journey untouched and what it offers to the local church. This ministry will revitalize a church that has not grown to thirty or more people. Every church started small and only through correct systems and accountable administration can it grow to a hundred. To continue growing the "Pastor" has to grow. Acts 2 Journey will help give the pastor and his leaders the tools they need to organize for growth. Without personal growth, the local assembly will stagnate and fail to win the lost. "One businessman recently said,

Churches are putting out a lot of content, but honestly, they aren't taking much action."¹² That is a point to ponder. We truly want to grow but find it difficult to apply the principles of growth. Simply put, there has to be a commitment to learn and to change. You must take your leaders with you on the journey. Several churches are working hard to bounce back after COVID. Two things I know that will work. Giving to missions and organizing people. Everything is conquered in steps, (strategy) finding those steps takes work. No matter what it looks like, the end results of teamwork will prove the sacrifice was worth it.

Hope

Something is wrong when your church grows and then declines again. At this point, pastors feel like quitting the ministry for good. Some join a staff under the leadership of a larger church. What problems did you inherit when you took over your church? What are you going to do about it? Did God make a mistake calling you there or did you make the mistake? "When you are called by Jesus to lead a turnaround church, you are called to strengthen what remains and is about to die."¹³ You cannot grow without addressing this first step. You invest in the now so that you can have a tomorrow. What do you invest in? Nothing less than a hurting heart, over and over again. You invest decision after decision. A pastor left his church after ten years of faithful and hurtful ministry. At his going away party he was convinced that he had made the wrong decision to leave. Testimony after testimony of lives influenced or changed because of his ministry, but it was too late to rescind the decision.

A pastor may be the last one to recognize his influence because of low financial support or low attendance. The real problem is that churches always have people problems and a myriad

¹² Josh Dotzler, *Church in Crisis, Lessons For The Church From The COVID-19 Crisis*, (Omaha: ABIDE, 2020), 3

¹³ Donald Ross, *Turnaround Pastor, Pathways To Save, Revive And Build Your Church*, (Donald Ross, 2013), 6.

of other problems. You don't get to choose your problems; the problem chooses you. Your heart is going to hurt but you are going to grow through the painful experience. The key to your success is knowing that it is going to take time and talent to win. The talent here is love, loving the people, and growing them into a strong church.

Some problems are unique to the Hispanic church such as people in hiding because of immigration issues. How do you break the cycle of pain that parents pass on to their children? A good principle to learn is, "you are always getting ready to make a courageous decision, recovering from a courageous decision, or in the middle of a courageous decision."¹⁴ Being the pastor of such a dysfunctional church is very difficult, yet God called you to love the people he is trying to reach through you.

It's not just a decision to focus on the lost, it is deciding for no one to not walk alone. Praying with them about the people they know and for creative ways to share Christ. One man who consistently spoke harshly and derogatory against the pastor and the people for not being a catholic, one day turned his whole life around and even called on the pastor for friendship and help. What happened? Prayer. When you pray for people, the Holy Spirit has a way of making your testimony a lifeline of hope.

CONCLUSION

The need for a strong church is critical yet every step in the right direction has a gravitational pull towards defeat. "Every decision can become a tug-of-war between the pastor and the board."¹⁵ Teach the principles of success with excellence, reality, passion, and patience. It's not that people don't want to share Christ, it's that they struggle with the longevity of their

¹⁴ Ibid., 35-36.

¹⁵ Ibid., 89.

testimony. Teach them that success is failing forward, that success is not being perfect but growing. Galatians 5:22 is the developing of fruit in everyone. A process needs to be taught and encouraged for development.

John Lindell preached a sermon many years ago where he made the statement, “Write your History.” No matter what the present is, we have the chance to create new history. Working on me will create a new me and that is contagious. Positive change will overflow into their marriages and upon their children.

Moses led his people out of Egyptian slavery, but he didn’t work alone. His fears caused him to make excuses. His father-in-law had to teach him to trust others. He then had to develop an army and a successor. We are not given the specifics, only the outcome of working on a developmental process for many years. Leadership is developed and systems are created. If CDDC is going to see a better future it needs you. Together we are very valuable. Having our presbyters walk in guided authority and being better connected with our churches is just the beginning. I want to add your name to our roster of heroes. We are in good hands if your hands are united with our hands as we forge our future.

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