

An Interview with Pastor Harold Hagedorn

Pastor Harold Hegedorn has been in the public ministry for over 40 years. The majority of that time was spent as the administrator for the Board for Home Missions. Before he served fulltime in home missions, he served at two parishes in Douglas, AZ and Fort Collins, CO. He identified these years as instrumental in shaping his perspective and his years as BHM administrator. With his retirement from his administrative duties in the summer of 2010, his time as administrator lasted 22 years. Those years were the focus of the interview.

Pastor Hagedorn served for two years as Associate Executive Secretary with Norman Berg. During those two years, a fundamental philosophical change in how to do home missions took place. The change involved switching from a 'top-down, missions are done by Milwaukee' philosophy to a philosophy that viewed the BHM as less authoritative on where and how to do missions and enlisted a more local emphasis and ownership of each mission. Pastor Hagedorn felt the Lord has used this fundamental change to empower people to fail forward in their mission endeavors. This allows areas to not always have to wait for someone from the BHM to tell them they can do missions in location X, but allows them seek out mission opportunities which the BHM can then facilitate.

The job of the BHM administrator, which Pastor Hagedorn became in 1988, was described as being an encourager, an enabler, and an equipper. He viewed the position as being less of a home missions director, and more of a home missions coordinator. His job was not to decide where missions go but to use the information provided on a local level and to decide on that basis where the mission funds could be appropriated. Again, this reflects the fundamental philosophy change noted above which endured through his ministry as administrator.

Early in his administration financial difficulties were present. One way they tried to counter this was to rely on good planning before jumping into a mission. This prevented throwing money at a mission without knowing if there was a viable mission field present. Pastor Hagedorn felt this was the most faithful way to use the funds the Lord has given the church. Another way they attempted to counter this

was by reducing congregational subsidy. By reducing the congregational subsidy, the goal was to make people less reliant on structured Synod subsidy to fund missions and more reliant on solid planning which would draw the help of the BHM in whatever way possible.

In 1991, the BHM made an ambitious 10 year plan to start 300 missions by the year 2000. Pastor Hagedorn clarified that this wasn't meant to be 300 new pins on the map but 300 new areas where outreach was being done that wasn't being done before. This could include cross-cultural outreach from an established congregation, a joint mission effort between two congregations, etc. While the 300 number may have never been reached, the ambition of the endeavor opened the eyes of many, particularly on the district mission board level, to see mission opportunities in places they had never looked.

In 1993 the Lift High the Cross offering was coming to an end. Synod set up the North American Outreach Effort. The purpose of this was to encourage more giving by joining the pot of special offerings for the outreach efforts of the BHM, BWM, Parish Services, and Ministerial Education. The plan was to have a rotating distribution of the funds every four years. What they found out was that people were not giving anymore than they did before. The unfortunate side effect was that people, seeing only the times the funds were specially giving for one project and not another, thought Synod could find money whenever they wanted. Pastor Hagedorn felt this led to a tension that still exists today where those on the front line view their CMO offerings as less important than picking and choosing their favorite outreach emphasis. This has set up a positioning of these different outreach areas against each other where they shouldn't be. We will continue to have to fight this battle in years to come.

In 1995, the Synod encouraged the BHM to increase the level of awareness of home missions work by Synod members. Pastor Hagedorn saw this effort as a failure. People just didn't want a bunch of mail from the BHM. In retrospect he wondered whether the BHM shouldn't have been spending more time networking and building relationships on a more personal level to increase awareness of home mission work.

The Barnabas Plan developed in 1997. It was an effort to help missions and missionaries in light of the fact that their marketing effort wasn't taking. The Barnabas Plan involved a purposeful contact

between a mission board member and a mission congregation or missionary with the express purpose of encouraging and aiding the missions where they needed help. Pastor Hagedorn saw this as a very helpful system that is still in place today.

Pastor Hagedorn was convinced that the increase in mission work in 1999 was a direct result of the BHM's philosophical change kicking in. It encouraged people to look for mission opportunities and develop them locally. The fruit of this change came together in 1999 and we pray that it continue to yield fruit. To view missions from this perspective is perhaps the best way to counter the financial challenges that face us in the future by relying less on central funding to completely start missions and more on local efforts which can be supplemented by the BHM. Unfortunately 9/11 happened, and the financial shock it worked stifled this mission increase from a statistical viewpoint.

The crash of the world market in 2001 perhaps also limited the practical implementation of the team ministry concept brought forth in that year. Originally it began as an idea that it would be helpful to start a mission with a 'preacher', a "music guy", an 'outreach guy', etc. Finances limited this implementation, but the concept was seen as incredibly valuable. Currently this concept finds its practicality through the mission counselors, DMB chairmen, missionaries, etc. working together on missions to help them succeed in whatever way is humanly possible.

Gaining the perspective of our past leaders is an important task. It was a joy to gain Pastor Hagedorn's perspective. As we understand the past, we hope to use that knowledge to move forward in the future. To gain an understanding of what has been done, what has worked, what has failed, and the reasons behind these decisions and results is valuable for making future decisions. Whether we follow in his footsteps exactly or not, we can thank God for using a man like Pastor Hagedorn in service to his church.

Mission work is no easy endeavor. It takes hard work and a willingness to fail. It's very easy for people to sit back and criticize the decisions made by administrators and boards, but these decisions our leaders make are both difficult and weigh heavily on their hearts. The Lord has told us to go and make disciples, but he has not told us the exact way to go about that. An administrator like Pastor Hagedorn

had to wrestle with these decisions. I pray that the Lord continue to raise up leaders like Pastor Hagedorn who are willing to approach a monumental task with a gospel heart and a love for people. We cannot know what the Lord holds in store for us in the future, but we do know that until he returns he will continue to provide us with outreach opportunities. We must be willing to look for these opportunities, go after them, and then honestly evaluate how we may be able to go about the task more faithfully.

I thank Pastor Hagedorn for his willingness to serve. Sola Deo Gloria

Dan Westendorf

Early Ministry

Could you give a brief overview of the two congregations you served before beginning full time ministry with the BHM?

How did your early ministry years help/hinder your perspective as the administrator of the BHM?

- St. Paul in Douglas, AZ
- St. Peter in Fort Collins, CO
- Your years as District Mission Board Chairman for the Colorado Conference

BHM YEARS

For two years you served as Associate Executive Secretary for the BHM with Norman Berg...

- Could you elaborate on what you learned from him, positive or negative?

In 1988 you were called to be the Administrator for the BHM...

- Can you give a general overview of what being the administrator for the BHM entails?
- Can you describe the process involved in starting a new mission from your end?

In 1987 the BHM reported financial shortfalls opening only (not meant to be derogatory!) 18 of 40 planned missions...

- Can you describe how you faced these problems as a beginning BHM administrator?
- What insights, if any, can you provide on how you may have handled the same situations differently later in your ministry?
- The BHM made efforts to put congregations on more structured plans for subsidy reduction, how did you go about tackling that job?

In 1991 a 10 year plan was formulated to begin 300 mission congregations by 2000...

- What were the biggest human obstacles to reaching that goal?
- How well did that 10 year plan go?
- Numbers aside how did the Lord bless the BHM's ambitious efforts?
- What administrative challenges did you encounter in undertaking such a large long range plan?

In 1993 BHM reported several areas of emphasis...

- The BHM emphasized the renewal of mother/daughter congregations. How did your involvement in those types of mission starts differ from a traditional exploratory start?
- What are the advantages and disadvantages of a mother/daughter mission start?
- The BHM also issued a report entitled *A Strategy for Mission and Ministry Across Cultures in Urban North America*. What blessings did the Lord bring through these cross cultural efforts?
- Another development of this biennium was the realization that the Lift High the Cross offering was coming to an end. It was resolved that the BHM encourage congregations to increase their Synod Mission Offering. What plans were put in place to accomplish this and how well do you feel the BHM accomplished this task?

There was an effort in 1995 for the BHM to publish their clear mission statements and produce materials for aiding mission advancement...

- The Synod in convention resolved that the BHM seek ways to increase general understanding of the process of starting missions. What did that mean on your end? Could you sense if it was successful or not and how?

In 1997...

- The Barnabas Plan was proposed. What led the BHM to see the need for such a program?
- Do we still use it and can you comment on its worth or lack thereof?
- The BHM proposed a separate mission district for Canada which the Synod in convention voted down. What were the factors that led to the BHM's recommendation?
- What challenges did you face with the Canadian mission field that you had to work around as a result of the rejected proposal?

In 1999 the BHM reported a healthy amount of mission activity (75 developing mission areas)...

- Humanly speaking, what led to the increase in mission activity?
- As the administrator, the more the Lord blesses the work, the more work it would seem you have to do. During this time of spreading mission work, what kind of prioritization problems did you face?

In 2001 the BHM emphasized the team ministry concept...

- If possible, can you comment on how this slightly different mission approach eased or added to you work as the administrator?

In 2005 the BHM prioritized mission according to levels...

- What led the BHM to see a need to make these distinctions?
- How did the Synod's resolution for the BHM to focus on level 1 and 2 missions change your approach to administering the BHM?
- This was also right around the time that the BHM and BWM were attempting to streamline. How did this affect your responsibilities? What were the added blessings?...challenges?

General Insights

- While you were administrator of the BHM from 1988 to 2010, what were some of the biggest changes made in its operation? ...planning implementation? ...mission strategy? ...vision?
- As only the Lord is able to do, he humbles as a reminder to rely on him and gives us victories when we need them most, can you describe some of your most disappointing moments as administrator? ...some of your most rewarding?
- What were some of the more unexpected developments the Lord dropped into your lap as administrator over the years?
- Can you describe the balance needed in handling new mission opportunities with maintaining current mission endeavors?
- Can you comment from your experience on the benefits of mission counselors in starting and developing home missions?
- Can you describe how the Synod's differing financial situations during your years as administrator affected the outlook and approach of the BHM?
- Would you say the financial situation of the Synod at any given time directly correlated to the perceived challenges/opportunities of the BHM at a given time? If so, how? If not, was there one factor that did?
- ?? Could you comment on what you think our Synod's strengths in mission work are going forward...weaknesses???
- What lessons did you learn about the Lord and his church during your years at the BHM?
- Can you give a personal opinion of what you think the challenges will be for the next generation attempting to start missions here in our own 'backyard'?