

Report of the Interim Eastern Regional Superintendent October 2023 – September 2024

The backstory revisited....

I have served as the Interim ERA Regional Superintendent since April 2023, using the following as a working job description:

After thoughtful conversation as the Eastern Regional Board of Directors and in keeping with what appears to be Clayton's natural ministry bent, we see his first responsibility as being pastor to the pastors of the Eastern Regional Association. We desire for him to establish a goal to contact active and retired pastors, to become aware of their needs and discern ways he might encourage and serve them. In addition to secondary means of connecting such as Zoom, phone, texts, and emails, we hope for face-to-face conversations whenever possible. Though it is natural to focus on church and vocational matters, we ask that he make the condition of the pastor's soul integral to each conversation.

A secondary responsibility for him will be to work hand in glove with Conference Ministerial and Executive Committees concerning pastoral placement, churches in crisis, pastors in need of special attention, and the tracking of leaders and students within the region. Primarily through his interaction with Conference leaders, he will be able to discern the ebbs and flows of Eastern Regional church life and pass that on to the Regional Board. We expect him to work diligently to make certain that information flows in both directions.

A tertiary responsibility will be for him to fill open pulpits within the Eastern Region on a limited basis. He will also attend Camp Meetings and Conference Annual Meetings when possible.

In June the ERA Board adopted the following job description for the permanent superintendent.

"The Superintendent shall be employed part-time (130 hours/month roughly) by the Eastern Regional Board of Directors for a term of 3 years. An annual evaluation by the Regional Board will be conducted covering areas laid out in this document. (Revision of specific job responsibilities may be made at the agreement of the Superintendent and the Regional Board and should be reflected in updates to this document.) Should the Superintendent or the Regional Board desire a change, a 60-day severance period shall be provided for, or a time mutually agreed upon.

The Superintendent will believe in the mission of the Advent Christian Church and its unique message as an important part of the body of Christ worldwide. He should understand and embrace the ERA Statement of Faith.

Qualifications:

- A faithful follower of Jesus Christ.
- An Ordained Minister, with experience in church and denominational affairs, having served a minimum of 10 years in faithful pastoral endeavors as well as having served in a position on the conference, regional or denominational level.
- A seminary/graduate degree is preferred, but not mandatory. Knowledge of the Bible and of church administration and policy is a must.
- A continued, evident pursuit of learning and growing in grace and knowledge.
- Able to instill confidence and effectively communicate.
- Demonstrates compassion and discretion, especially as it relates to personal affairs and counsel as well as engagement with churches, boards, etc.
- Of good repute and spiritually mature, not given to excesses or identified with narrow interests within the Christian community.

Responsibilities:

1. The superintendent's first responsibility is to the pastors of the Eastern Regional Association. He will remain in regular contact, staying aware of their needs and the ways he can help or equip them as needed. The preferred method of this contact will be face-to-face, but utilizing other means (Zoom, phone calls, texts, emails) will prove vital as well.
2. The second responsibility is to work in partnership with the leadership of the conferences of the Eastern Region. As each conference's leadership and/or conference pastor is the first point of contact for our pastors and churches, the ERA Superintendent should find ways to be of assistance, helping them in their functions of pastoral placement, aiding churches in crisis, tracking and assisting developing leaders. He should work to ensure that lines of communication remain open with conference leadership. The superintendent will prioritize attending conference annual meetings.
3. The superintendent will be responsible for visiting a variety of churches and camps within the Eastern Region. An attempt should be made to touch base with each ministry within the three-year term. Special care should be paid to specific fellowships, as identified in partnership with the Regional and Conference Leadership.
4. Other Responsibilities
 - Attend Eastern Regional meetings, Triennial Conferences, and Superintendents Meetings.
 - Serve as a resource person to the Regional Board as they plan the yearly Convention.
 - Help facilitate communication between the Eastern Region and ACGC
 - Preach in ERA churches at his discretion.

The position has been posted in regional and ACGC publications, suggestions received, and work begun to identify a person to serve in this capacity.

In the intervening months, I have often prayed "Lord, please grant the one of your choosing the ability to pass through to the bruised and hurt lives of

pastors and wives in the Eastern Region Your tender power of healing and grace. May it be so.”

The Raw Data....

• Pastors: General Conversation —	143 Face to face
	9 Zoom
	28 Phone
• Pastors: Mentoring	36
• Pastors: Spiritual Conversation	12
• Conversations with Church, Conference, regional & ACGC personnel	100
• Conference meetings attended	14
• Congregations visited	29
• Listened to pastors’ sermons online	88
• Texts & emails (Pastors)	2,262
• Texts & emails (Administrative)	384
• Hours	1,440.8
	(Monthly average — 120.07)

- ACGC Superintendents’ and Executive Council Meetings in Charlotte, February 4-9, 2024
- Attended the funeral of retired Pastor Kenneth Fox on-line
- Conducted the graveside service for Howard Lash, Alan Chamberlin’s father-in-law (Alan is the pastor of the Friendship, ME Advent Christian Church)
- Preached in Torrington, CT Sunday, August 4, 2024

Narrative....

Job descriptions prove easier to write than flesh out. When the regional board and I engaged in conversation about the position, no pastoral vacancies existed. This made it easy for me to sign on given my ongoing desire to engage pastors in regular conversation, something I had attempted to do through my years of retirement. The piece that represents the greatest challenge — my preference for face-to-face meetings. I like to look people in the eye, watch body language, and give a solid handshake or hug at the end of our time.

In the past year, Search Teams at Blessed Hope Church in Waterville, ME and Oak Hill Bible Church in Oxford, MA have invited me to join them in their search for pastoral leadership.

Blessed Hope anticipates a full-time pastor to replace Mike Alix who now serves on the General Conference staff. After a good bit of prayer and

conversation, they invited a candidate to visit Waterville for a weekend to preach during Sunday worship and interact with the congregation after the service. By the time of Regional Convention, the congregation will have voted on whether to extend a call to this candidate.

Oak Hill has completed a congregational survey and engaged in extensive conversation to discern whether they are searching for a full-time pastor or two who might serve co-vocationally. Erik Reynolds serves as their interim pastor for 30 hours a week. They are beginning to think through the interviewing process with a potential candidate.

Reading highlights during the past year include Transforming Friendships: Lessons from John Stott and Others, read to shore up sensitivity to pastors as I attempt to put flesh and blood into caring for pastors in the region. I also read The Disciple Dilemma: Rethinking and Reforming How the Church Does Discipleship by Dennis Allen. I recommend both as worthy reading time investments.

Other pastoral changes in the region include Russell Giasson who completed his ministry in Haverhill and moved back to the Oxford Hills, Maine area. The congregation has utilized several speakers to preach including former Superintendent Greg Twitchell and a couple of people Russell Carle is mentoring.

Merle Beal was ordained to Christian Ministry by the New Life Conference on Saturday, September 28. Dwight Dean preached the Occasional sermon, I delivered the Charge to the Candidate and Steve Brown offered the Ordaining Prayer. Merle's final Sunday in Westfield was October 20. He will begin serving Emmanuel Church in Rochester as Pastor of Discipleship on November 3.

I want to express my great appreciation to my wife Hazel who most often travels with me and spends time with pastors' wives, to regional administrative assistant, Kathleen Irvine for her diligent work in producing and emailing regional newsletters as well as handling other responsibilities related to maintaining the regional office, and to regional bookkeeper Lisa Godard who serves as the day-to-day steward of regional funds.

Clayton Blackstone