**RCFN Self-Study Report**

**“River City Faith Network 2.0”**

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**Introduction**

**Appreciation**

It has been an honor to work with the leaders and volunteers of the River City Faith Network, in doing the research for this self-study. Seldom is an organization blessed with such a high caliber of professional, highly competent, and committed employees and volunteers.

Special appreciation is offered to Executive Assistant, JoEllen Schneider and Steve Allsbrook, interim Executive Director. Jo Ellen is more than qualified and a multi – skilled assistant with a wonderful, cooperative spirit. She closed every email to me making sure that I was never to hesitate in asking for her for more assistance. And what can I say about Steve Allsbrook? For fifteen years he was my colleague in associational ministry and a friend, from whom I learned much. True to his style, Steve’s polite candor and detailed insights have informed but never brought undue influence on this report. During this time of significant transition, the Network is blessed, beyond words, to have such a capable and knowledgeable leader at the helm.

**Purposes**

This study was begun with the WMU encouraging churches and individuals to pray for all aspects of this discernment process. The scriptural theme was: “Commit to the Lord whatever you do and he will establish your plans.” Proverbs 16:3.

The primary purpose of this study is to provide the Board of Directors with information that will aid them in better understanding the challenges, options and potential of the River City Faith Network.

Additionally, if the Board determines the best model for leading, managing and staffing the Network’s future ministry includes employing a paid executive leader, the Search Committee will use this study to understand the type of leader whose calling and skill-sets meet the challenges and potential before the Network.

Finally, another goal is that this research will result in strengthening RCFN’s current ministries while becoming a catalyst for envisioning new opportunities that more fully serve the churches, as well as the people of the Richmond area.

**Preface**

Naming the study “River City Faith Network, 2.0”, is an attempt to anticipate a new future. Hopefully, this title will inform the committed and loyal leaders, volunteers, and churches of RCFN, that the intent of this report is to build on the legacy of the ministry Centers and Camp Alkulana. Also, hopefully, the “2.0” will alert those who may have concerns with some particular aspect of the RCFN, that a serious attempt will be made to strengthen weak areas and expand the Network’s mission impact.

This study did not explore issues regarding the homosexual issue that the Richmond Baptist Association discussed and decided upon in 2013. These matters were thoroughly debated and settled at that time.

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**Survey**

The survey was emailed in May to 302 people and 55 sent in responses to the RCFN office. The largest category of responders were volunteers; closely followed by clergy. Also, the majority, 58%, of the responders were women.

The survey, listening sessions, and personal interviews all revealed that the Ministry Centers and the Camp are the focus, identity and pride of the Network. Rightfully, this was no surprise.

Regarding the Executive Director, the surveys demonstrate that the next director should have, in addition the qualities of all good leaders, the ability to respond to the current weaknesses and challenges facing the Network.

Only a couple of surveys indicated that the Network no longer needs a full-time leader. In private conversations this matter was raised more frequently. The rationale for part-time is threefold. 1. The income from the churches does cover Network expenses and no longer is there enough revenue to hire a full-time director. 2. The primary focus of the Network is the ministry of the Camp and Centers and, because more-than-capable, top-notch professionals lead these ministries, a full–time director is not needed. 3. Coupled with reason two, is the intention that decreasing the Executive Director to a part-time position could possibly provide additional revenue for other ministries.

Surprisingly, the topic of needing a better method of governance, (i.e., the levels of association according to giving levels, involvement and membership rights), did not surface in the survey. However, almost all Network leaders and informed volunteers recognize the need to improve the current system, yet the topic was not mentioned, as would be expected. The reason for the absence of registered frustration may be that the survey did not adequality explore the matter.

Appendix 1 contains the detailed survey responses.

Appendix 2 lists many other people in the city, state and country who offered insight through formal interviews and conversations.

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**Strengths of RCFN**

(Not in order of importance)

1. **Passionate commitment to share the love of Jesus with the “less than these.”**

Demonstrating the love of Jesus to those in need, is lodged deep in the Network’s DNA. Even before the Richmond Baptist Association was birthed in 1951 by city churches from Dover and Middle District Associations, Baptists in Richmond were passionately sharing God’s love by caring for, what Jesus called, “the least of these.” Reading the 50th anniversary history of the Richmond Baptist Association, *Blessed by the Past, Embracing the Future*, will enlighten and inspire those who are unaware of the rich heritage the Baptist foremothers and forefathers of Richmond have bestowed to our generation.

In 1914 the Baptist women pioneered the first of its kind, a settlement house that was a haven for many children, teenagers and mothers. It was called the House of Happiness and was the first good will center in the Southern Baptist Convention. RCFN now has three ministry centers that continue this legacy.

Camp Alkulana is recognized far and wide as one of RCFN’s premier ministries. Started in 1915, the camp was offered by Baptist women in Richmond, as an opportunity to show God’s love to city children through camping in the woods. Today, Alkulana leadership can point to third-generation families who have experienced the love of God during their weeks spent at the Camp.

When churches began leaving the Richmond Baptist Association over the homosexual issue in 2013, many individuals rose to the occasion and continued supporting these ministries though designated giving because they could not live with the thought of the Camp and Centers no longer existing. Much of this designated giving continues to this day.

One of the most overriding themes that was revealed in the recent survey is that missions and ministry are still the heartbeat of Richmond Baptists.

1. **Cooperation, Persistence and Adaptability**

Before there was a Richmond Baptist Association, Baptists in the Richmond and the Manchester areas, joined together to cooperatively impact their communities with the Gospel. The churches were members of Dover and Middle District, yet they recognized needs in the city that only they were equipped to meet. Thus, the Baptist Council of Richmond, Manchester, and Vicinity was formed in 1903. This cooperative body became the forerunner of the Richmond Baptist Association that was formed forty-eight years later, in 1951.

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(Strengths: Cooperation, Persistence and Adaptability, cont.)

With determination, sacrifice, creativity and a passion to reach the lost while caring for the needy, these early twentieth century Richmond Baptists created multiple types of caring ministries. On some occasions, their strong entrepreneurial spirit and willingness to do the unusual were sometimes misunderstood. Such was the case from the beginning of their cooperative ministries and this was reflected in the Council’s 1905 minutes:

It will be remembered that the original design of the council with respect to City Missions was to prosecute religious work among the neglected portions of our community; **that we took up civic business** only because there was urgent need for someone to do it properly, that by doing this work we could better reach the unfortunate and the abandoned element with a Gospel message, and that, just as soon as conditions would admit of a different course, we should turn our attention to other things…. In the providence of God, that time seems to have come.” (*Blessed by the Past, Embracing the Future*, p. 90.)

The 1903 Council’s creativity and determination were demonstrated when the new leader, Dr. Buchannan, suggested the Council’ headquarters should become the old Ballard House. At one time, this was one of the most prestigious hotels in Richmond, but had deteriorated into a cheap lodging house, famous for its depravity and squalor. Not only was the dilapidated hotel refurbished into living quarters for the new leader and office space for the new ministry, but soon after it also housed a men’s dormitory. So many men filled the rooms that thirty additional beds had to be secured and placed in a hall of this former hotel. (History, p.83.) Of special interest to today’s RCFN, is that the author of RBA’s anniversary history refers to this as, “this **experiment** in city missions.”

In current times, the cooperative spirit of the RCFN is most notable in its desire to cooperate with all churches, organizations, and individuals who share the same passion for serving “the least of these”. RCFN Bylaw, Article II, states it this way:

The membership of the Network shall be composed of Baptist churches **and likeminded organizations** located in the metropolitan area of Richmond, Virginia. The churches and organizations that constitute the River City Faith Network are those that share the passion and mission of serving the underserved of our community….

Early Richmond Baptists were persistent in finding donors and churches to support new mission experiments. A century later, the persistence and ability to adapt would become a significant challenge for Richmond Baptists. During the ministry of Executive Team Leader, Pete Duplessis, (2005 – 2010), the Association recovered from years of declining income. When asked how the recovery happened, Pete explained:

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(Strengths: Cooperation, Persistence and Adaptability, cont.)

“Bob Bass, the treasurer, would call me up and say, ‘Pete, you got to cut back. And we’d find a way to do it. Then he’d call back later and say, ‘Pete you got to cut back some more.’ And we’d find a way to do some more cutting. Time and time again we cut back enough, that we were finally in the black by the time I left the RBA.”

The financial repercussion of the RBA’s vote involving the ordination of a homosexual resulted in a reduction in annual giving of approximately $250,000. This became the severest test of persistence and adaptability Richmond Baptists have ever faced. Nevertheless, the Association’s leadership, staff and volunteers banned together, adapted a new organizational structure; made sacrificial, financial adjustments, all the while demonstrating a Christian spirit and continuing to offer ministry during such turbulent times.

1. **Excellent Employees and Committed Volunteers**

During this time of transition and challenge for the Network, it is widely recognized that the current staff members, permanent and interim, are all called of God, ideal professionals, deeply committed, tremendously experienced, and multi-talented. These people, along with the Network’s passionate volunteers, have the ability to be the foundation of renewing the vision and ministry of the RCFN.

One example will sufficiently demonstrate this. During Camp Alkulana’s support team Zoom meeting in May, it was shared how the youngest member of the team raised more than $12,000 by having his network of friends play a virtual Star Wars game. Such creativity and passion currently reside in many members and friends of the RCFN.

1. **Endowment**

Over the years, RCFN has been blessed by churches that were closing and gave part of their proceeds to the Network. Likewise, individuals who are burdened for sharing the love of Jesus with the hurting and under-privileged have given generously during and after their lifetimes. To date the RCFN has a little over $2,000,000 in investments. That is a blessing beyond belief.

Additionally, Camp Alkulana has been blessed by those who share its missional vision. Currently the Camp has approximately $447,000 in investments, which includes an endowment of $309,393 and a repairs fund with $98,414 and an activities fund (for ministry programs) with $39,408.  Lives have been changed because of the ministry Camp Alkulana has provided over these many years. These financial contributions, the hundreds of service hours, along with financial gifts, demonstrate how much people will support a ministry that is making an impact.

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(Strengths: Endowment, cont.)

These endowments are crucial, supplemental revenue for the on-going ministries of RCFN. Recently, the Board of Directors made a wise decision to use the sale of the Network’s Moss Ave. property to endow the cost of office rent, for years to come.

1. **Unity**

Some may be surprised that unity is listed as a RCFN strength. Granted, the anger and frustration that was expressed over the homosexual issue is gone. However, after many private conversations and interviews, it is obvious to the writer of this report, that there exists a concern and differences of opinion on how best to solve the issue of budget deficits. One possibility that is offered by some, and rejected by others, is to employ a part-time, rather full-time, Executive Director. Additionally, until recent months, there existed a growing, hushed opinion that a change in leadership could potentially bring a renewed trust and vitality for some who reported validated concerns during their interviews.

In spite of the lack of unity regarding the above concerns, there resides a deep well of hope that the RCFN can and will rise to the challenges of this time in its life. This hope far exceeds any concerns, expressed publicly or privately. The ministries of the past and present continue to touch the hearts of everyone who has ever been part of the RCFN family. No one expects to return to the glory days of yesteryear. However, everyone is united in hoping and praying that somehow, someway the leaders will find a path foreword, so that the RCFN will survive and soon begin to thrive.

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**Challenges Facing the RCFN**

1. **Inability to attract additional congregations and increase revenue**

The official mission of the RCFN reads:

“River City Faith Network is a diverse family of churches and organizations working together to bring living water to transform our communities through the love of Jesus Christ and for the glory of God.”

However, looking back over the past decade, it might be said that the unstated mission of the Network has been to survive and keep the Camp and Centers ministries functioning after churches began leaving because of the issue revolving around the homosexual issue. With the help of generous individuals, endowments, and sustaining churches, we can all agree – mission accomplished.

In the aftermath of the contentious vote of 2013, Network leaders are to be praised for developing an inclusive vision that focused on mission and included churches outside the Baptist tribe. The bylaws state:

The membership of the Network shall be composed of Baptist churches and likeminded organizations … that share the passion and mission of serving the underserved of our community….

In attempting to become more inclusive and attractive to congregations not in the RBA, a new name was chosen that intentionally left out the word “Baptist.” The hope then, as it remains today, was that the opportunity to be significantly involved with the ministries of the Centers and Camp would be so attractive to other congregations and organizations, that they would want to become involved, at some level, and support the Network with volunteers, financial resources, or both.

Unfortunately, that hasn’t happened. The RCFN has not had new churches join the network and the income has been diminishing. Changing the name and having a strong missional component to the bylaws have not been enough to attract new churches and organizations to partner with the RCFN.

It is possible that the necessity of focusing on the Network’s survival after the 2013 crises became the paramount. Little or no time or energy was available to meet with a lot of prospective pastors and church leaders. Additionally, part of the current reality in the church world is that many younger pastors see no advantages and have no interest in becoming formally or informally connected to any denominational entities. A third potential roadblock for some congregations is that they don’t agree with the Network’s stand regarding ordaining a homosexual.

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Challenges facing the RCFN, cont.

1. **An aging and diminishing volunteer base**

Most leaders and knowledgeable volunteers in the RCFN, along with the three community missionaries and Camp director, expressed concern that the volunteer base from the churches continues to dwindle.

Beginning in the nineteenth century until today, Baptist women have led the way in raising funds and volunteers for ministry in Richmond. Now, in our time, the

WMU mission organizations across the Southern Baptist Convention continue to diminish and fewer and fewer ladies are physically able to provide the level of involvement they once did. (Making this point, in no way reduces the invaluable and necessary role men have always played in Kingdom work.)

The RCFN churches, like most congregations, continue to become predominately filled with senior adults. The result is that the pool of younger, able volunteers is slowly disappearing.

The natural consequence of these trends is that, at some point, RCFN’s current ministry efforts will weaken to the point of no longer being viable. Their endowments will be used up and the scarcity of volunteers will cause the ministries to shut down.

1. **An inadequate governance system**

The vote over ordaining a homosexual to the gospel ministry was so close that it was clear to many knowledge leaders that, if the RBA had other requirements in place regarding a congregation’s financial and ministry participation, the vote probably would have been different and the rupture much less damaging.

With the intentions of improving the bylaws, new levels of membership (Core, Champion, Connector, and Community) were devised and adopted. Unfortunately, the categories continue to be difficult for some to keep straight and a few people think they are unfair. Additionally, under the current bylaw requirements, the Network sometime struggles to fill its roster of committee members. One committee member explained, “I accepted the job because he told me he couldn’t find anyone else and so I said I would serve.” (Quoting this one person is not to suggest that most people who serve feel this way. Not at all! Nevertheless, it does demonstrate that the plan was designed to solve a problem, but hasn’t worked as well as first envisioned.)

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Challenges facing the RCFN, cont.

1. **Lack of effective help for struggling churches**

Most all RCFN congregations are plateaued or declining. Some have closed their doors and no longer exist. More than 85% of all churches in America are in this condition, especially in urban areas. The situation is not unique to RCFN.

The primary focus of the RCFN, and each of its forerunners, has been ministry to “the least of these.” During the days of Executive Director Chuck Nunn, 1977 - 1997, the Association was fully staffed and there was plenty of training for pastors, laymen, and committees. After Dr. Nunn retired and Bob Perry became the Executive Missions Team Leader, Bob offered an assessment of the many strong features of the RBA ministry but then went on to note:

“It seems to me that we need to give an increased emphasis to church leadership development and need to do a better job … of starting new units of work and outreach…

We need to provide a worthy model of effective change and growth for the benefit of our churches. It should be reasonable for many of our churches to look to the Association as one example of how service to Christ can be effective, efficient, fun and fulfilling.”

Bob gave that challenge in 1977. Thirty-four years later the challenges our churches face are much worse and much larger. Recognizing this crises level problem, the SBC’s North American Mission Board has responded and made church vitality / revitalization a top priority.

The respondents in the survey indicated that improving church vitality is an important matter. Here is how they rated the need to help churches regain vitality:

Not Important 3%

Slightly Important 15%

Important 43%

Very Important 39%

RCFN should become more effective in providing encouragement, helpful resources and coaching that encourage and strengthen struggling churches. These congregations have supported the Network for many years, but now they need help.

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1. **Absence of Planting New Church Units**

We live in the best of times and the worst of times. On one hand, we see churches becoming weak and dying. On the other, God is moving in many urban areas. Many new churches are congregations that are ethnically diverse and filled with young families and children. They have a passion for evangelism while addressing local justice issues. They live in the urban core and work to transform their communities through ministries that demonstrate the love of Jesus.

One example of this comes from the United Kingdom where God birthed Fresh Expressions. A movement of “micro” churches that now has impacted Methodists, Anglicans, and even Baptists here in the States, including those in the BGAV.

Fortunately, methods and models of church planting have dramatically changed, for the better, in the past twenty years. More often than not, a new church plant is the result of an intentional discipleship-making effort, in a specific area, with a chosen small core. (The common exception is when the new plant is a campus of a multi-site church.)

The question facing the RCFN leadership is, in light of so many RCFN churches weakening and aged, is God calling some of the them to be like Sarah of the Bible, who birthed new life at a stage that would seem humanly impossible?

Could starting church plants bring new joy and excitement to this Network that is filled with seniors, just as the birth of a new grandchild brings joy to the grandparents? The answer is yes.

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**Recommendations**

It is a well-documented fact that the 1950’s into the early ‘60’s were golden years of religious life in America. Southern Baptists once bragged about reaching their goal of “A million more in ‘54”. Fast forward to the most recent statistics that indicate Southern Baptists have lost more than two million members since 2006 and last year’s baptisms dropped to the lowest point since the great influenza pandemic of 1918 and 1919.

Associations in every sector of the American life are declining, and that includes church associations in every denomination. Scores of Southern Baptist associations across America that once employed large staffs, are now reduced to two or three paid employees: the Executive Leader, the Administrative Assistant, and sometimes another part-time specialized minister. Here in Virginia, three decades ago there were at least twenty-five full-time Directors of Missions. Today, there may be as many as eight.

There are no silver bullets to reversing these religious trends. Only a mighty move of God can turn the tide.

Having admitted this, it is just as important to realize that God is still at work and doing marvelous, mind-boggling things in America, and that includes Richmond. Of special note is Christianity Today’s articles about Richmond in 2012 – 2013:

“Here … a multicultural and multiclass generation of Christian leaders are building new kinds of institutions that take Richmond’s future as seriously as its past.”

Recognizing the missional DNA of Richmond Baptists, it is possible for the Network to strengthen its core ministries of the Camp and Centers, while re-inventing itself to meet the challenges the churches and communities now face.

Re-inventing the Network may sound too radical, dramatic and idealistic. Some would say, “the conflict is over, things have settled down. The only big issue to face is figuring out how to solve the financial challenges. After we make a few improvements, tweak a few things, and get the new director in place, everything will be ok.” The author of this report disagrees with that perspective.

The following recommendations are made believing that:

* The strengths and future of the Network are its people and its missional DNA.
* The Network has enough finances in reserve to fund needed changes and new initiatives.
* The Network leaders must be willing to risk.
* The new director will not be the Network’s savior but can be the needed catalyst.

Recommendations cont. Page 13

1. **Set and fund the Network’s top three priorities for the next 4 – 5 years**

## Before the Search Committee begins to look for a new director, the Board of Directors should prayerfully discuss and vote on the Network’s top three priorities for the next four to five years.

Agreeing on the priorities first is paramount. Because:

* It will help determine the number of hours and scope and responsibilities of the next Executive Director. In turn, this decision will also help determine if the position is full-time or part-time.
* It will clarify what type of skill-sets the Search Committee should look for in potential candidates.
* It will help candidates know the focus and direction of the Network.

It is suggested that the Board consider following priorities:

1. Strengthen the RCFN’s current compassion ministries and develop new ones.
2. Facilitate starting a minimum of one church plant each year.

(The type of church plant is not of importance)

1. Create or partner with networks to increase the vitality of RCFN churches.

Note that this recommendation includes funding. It is one thing for the Network to say they want to make these adjustments and priorities; it is another to fund them.

1. **Decide which management and leadership model is best**

See: Appendix 3, Models and Options for Managing and Leading the Network

Appendix 4, Example of an Association Managed and Led by Committees

If the RCFN calls a part-time director, it will not reach its full Kingdom potential. There are enough funds in reserve to make this happen.

1. **Develop new revenue streams**

* Hire or enlist a grant writer

Many RCFN leaders currently see the wisdom of hiring a grant writer. Now is the time to do this, even if it means dipping into reserves.

(This recommendation is made recognizing that the Camp Director is to be commended for the grants she has written and received. Well done, Beth.)

Grant writing is too time-consuming to add it to the expectations of the next Executive Director.

Recommendations cont. Page 14

An example of the potential in grant writing:

In 2002 the SBC stopped its North American Mission Board from funding for the D.C. convention. They lost thousands of dollars! Robert Cochran, the former Executive Director of DCBC, reports that this was the stimulus that encouraged them to seek grants as a significant part of funding the

Convention’s ministry, as well as helping churches to write and receive grants.

* Make Camp Alkulana an independent “auxiliary” of the RCFN, like the WMU

Camp Alkulana is the pride and joy of RCFN. It has been and should be in the future.

Any Southern Baptist who has been around for a while, knows the vital roll the WMU has played in our mission work. Since its beginning in 1888, the ladies have raised six billion dollars to support missions. However, what many church members don’t know, or remember, is that “technically”

the WMU is not a part of the SBC. It is an independent, autonomous, “auxiliary.”

Allowing Camp Alkulana to become an auxiliary:

* Would continue to keep the relationship between the Camp and the churches strong. Outwardly there would be no difference from what the relationship is now. The Executive Director of the RCFN would be on the Camp’s board, along with others from RCFN churches.
* Expands the Camp’s ability to apply for grants that are not currently available because, legally, it is a church organization.
* Opens up the possibility that other denominations and non-profits will partner with the Camp.
* Allow the current leadership additional freedom to create new programs and ministries.

1. **Improve the Network’s current organizational structure**

At the next regular meeting of the Board of Directors, appoint a group of three to bring recommended improvements to the bylaws that simplify and better fit the current life of the Network. More specifically, the new structure should replace the current system of classifying churches as: Core, Champion, Connector, and Community. The proposed changes should maintain the goals of the current system of insuring that congregations that participate in decision-making, also contribute financially and are invested and involved in the Network’s ministries.

Recommendations cont. Page 15

If the needed bylaw changes are not made in six months, the Board of Directors will vote to temporarily set aside any bylaw that is recognized as needing improvement.

1. **Expand and Improve RCFN’s Compassion Ministry**

Given the missional DNA of the Network and its rich heritage with the Centers and Camp, it is no surprise that one of the highest scores on the survey related to the importance of: “starting additional ministries that bring physical help and the Gospel to the hurting and under-resourced in the community.”

Not Important 11%

Slightly Important 20%

Important 43%

Very Important 26%

The RCFN is blessed to have faithful, competent, dedicated and experienced leaders heading each of the compassion ministries -- the three ministry centers: South Richmond, Church Hill, Oregon Hill; and Camp Alkulana. They are to be commended for their willingness to improve and adapt.

In reviewing the compensation each leader receives, it is recommended that the RCFN Personnel Committee review salaries with the intent of giving a COLA adjustment plus merit increases to each leader in the 2022 budget. Additionally, it is recommended that the review include any supplementary raises that are necessary to bring about more uniformity and parity in compensation.

This recommendation is made acknowledging the financial condition and typical shortfall of the RCFN budget. However, it is also made recognizing the level of reserve funds.

Already this report has made one recommendation that applies to the RCFN’s compassion ministries:

“Make Camp Alkulana an independent “auxiliary” of the RCFN, like the WMU”

Additional recommendations:

* Produce professional-quality, short videos that will introduce the compassion ministries to community groups, mission committees, worship attenders, and on the Network’s website.
* Staff members should begin now to implement their plans for improvement, change and expansion.
* Develop new approaches / ministries that help local churches more effectively reach their communities with God’s love.

See Appendix: Connect Nashville Project, Annual Report.)

Connect Nashville Project is a good example of churches having their own compassion ministries.

Recommendations cont. Page 16

Recommending Connect Nashville as a sample ministry, does not imply that the current community missionaries are to start or lead such a ministry. Rather this, or some other initiative, would become a method for the next Executive Director to start and expand RCFN’s compassion ministries.

* Provide training for the support teams and the Board of Directors that will result in increasing the potential of each ministry and expanding ministry and funding.

1. **Carefully create a new profile and expectations of the next Executive Director**

* Decide if the challenge calls for a full-time or part-time person.

A part-time person “probably” could manage the current responsibilities of the role. However, only a full-time person will have the time to facilitate new initiatives that will greatly improve the Network’s impact.

* Be open to calling a person of color or a woman
* The Network director must be: called of God, a visionary leader, a creative entrepreneur, able to delegate, with an ability to build strong relationships.
* Clarify / Adjust the expectations of Executive Director
* If the incoming director’s strength is management and the schedule is consumed with administration, the Network will not reach its full potential.
* It is highly recommended that new, competent volunteers could help with many administration duties. (Consider adding volunteer staff.)
* Recognizing that the Camp and Centers have superb leaders directing their ministries, a full-time Executive Director should spend more time coaching rather than managing the trusted staff who do not need close supervision. (That is micro-managing.)
* Reconsider the title of the Network leader to more clearly focus on the person’s function.

Over time, the title has changed: Associational Missionary, Director of Missions, Team Leader, Mission Strategist, etc.

* Evaluate the Executive Director’s compensation

The projected salary for the incoming Executive Director is approximately $74,500. After researching salary packages in Virginia and other states, the Personnel Committee should realize this amount is in the lower range of compensation for a full-time Executive Director.

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**Conclusion and Challenge**

This report has not dealt with every matter that was brought to the attention of the writer. Apologies are offered to those who shared worthy suggestions and valid concerns that are not addressed. Space and time did not permit addressing every worthy issue and idea.

Henry Blackaby’s *Experiencing God* study, has reminded us that God is always at work around us and that He invites us to join Him in what he is doing. Here in Richmond, God is at work, to the degree that outside observers have noticed it. A few years ago, Christianity Today contained an article about what God is doing in our city:

“here … a multicultural and multiclass generation of Christian leaders are building new kinds of institutions that take Richmond’s future as seriously as its past.”

The Board of Directors realize that the Network is in a “liminal” season. Susan Beaumont writes about this in her book, *How to Lead When You Don’t Know Where You’re Going.* Like the children of Israel heading for the promised land, the Network has left the hard times that were experienced in Egypt, but the promised land is far away in the future.

The challenge before the Board of Directors, the Network at large, and the new Executive Director is to do the one thing that is the hardest to do. That thing is – RISK. That is almost impossible to do with a scarcity mindset. God calls us to be faithful stewards and to exercise faith… to get out of the boat.

The River City Faith Network has a rich and inspiring heritage. It also has an unbelievable, untapped potential. If the Spirit would write a letter to the RCFN, He would say what he did to the church in Sardis -

Wake up! Strengthen what remains and is about to die, for I have found your deeds unfinished in the sight of my God. Rev 3.2

Robert Dale, the recently deceased church consultant and friend to all of us, became famous for writing *Redreaming the Dream.* Church leaders who never knew Bob, have benefited from his writings on the “life cycle of a church”. Interestingly, two years ago, Bob rewrote that book and titled it, *Redreaming the Dream, Again*.

The time has come for the River City Faith Network to “redream the dream, again.”

**Appendix 1**

**Survey Results**

(Note: in reading the following percentages, sometimes the same number of people who answered a question may not have the exact same percentages. The explanation is that not everyone answered every question, thus different base numbers.)

4. People who took the survey

24 43.6 Volunteers

3 5.5 RCFN staff

18 32.7 Pastors / Associate Pastors

32 58.2 Members

5. Gender

22 40.0 Male

32 58.2 Female

1 1.8 Prefer not to answer

6. Total number of years in church leadership

Less than 5 1 1.8

5-10 1 4 25.5

11 – 20 7 12.7

21 – 30 12 21.8

31 + 21 38.2

7. Average Pre-Covid Worship Attendance

Less than 100 30%

100 – 200 20%

300 – 400 20%

400 – 600 3%

600 and Above 27%

8. Church Ethnicity Make Up (check all that apply)

Black / African American 24 43.6

Hispanic 11 20.0

International 18 32.7

White, non-Hispanic 43 78.2

Choose not to answer 4 7.3

9. How involved have you been with River City Faith Network?

None 4 7.3

Some 37 67.3

A lot 14 25.5

10. Do you frequently attend the Fall Leadership Development Conference sponsored by Dover, Middle District and RCFN?

Yes 13 26.5

No, was not aware of it 22 44.9

No, the topics aren’t relevant 7 14.3

No, I don’t travel at night 7 14.3

No, good topics but weak presentations 0 0

11. To what extent is your church involved with the ministry of the three mission centers (Church Hill, Oregon Hill, South Richmond?”

None 8 14.8

Some 23 42.6

A lot 23 42.6

12. To what extent is your church involved with Camp Alkulana?

None 9 16.4

Some 19 34.5

A lot 27 49.1

**Ratings, level of importance**

13. Training for churches to minister to their communities

Not Important 1 1.8

Slightly Important 3 5.5

Important 29 52.7

Very Important 22 40.0

14. Training churches in grant writing to help fund their community outreach

Not Important 4 7.3

Slightly Important 15 27.3

Important 29 52.7

Very Important 7 12.7

15. The RCFN starting additional ministries that bring physical help and the Gospel to the hurting and under-resourced in the community.

Not Important 6 10.9

Slightly Important 11 20.0

Important 24 43.6

Very Important 14 25.5

16. Starting new “micro” churches (in homes and other non-traditional locations)”

Not Important 10 18.2

Slightly Important 19 34.5

Important 15 27.3

Very Important 11 20.0

17. Starting new “building centered” churches

Not important 24 43.6

Slightly important 18 32.7

Important 12 21.8

Very Important 1 1.8

18. Guiding church mergers

Not Important 8 14.5

Slightly Important 16 29.1

Important 25 45.5

Very Important 6 10.9

19. Helping churches regain vitality

Not Important 2 3.7

Slightly Important 8 14.8

Important 23 42.6

Very Important 21 38.9

20. RCFN partnering with para-church ministries that bring physical help and the

Gospel to the hurting and under-resourced in the community

Not Important 0 0

Slightly Important 14 26.4

Important 21 39.6

Very Important 18 34.0

21. Promote community peacemaking and justice

Not Important 1 1.9

Slightly Important 6 11.1

Important 17 31.5

Very Important 30 55.6

22. Stewardship / Generosity Training

Not Important 6 11.1

Slightly Important 12 22.2

Important 25 46.3

Very Important 11 20.4

23. Providing ministerial support and fellowship

Not Important 4 7.4

Slightly Important 12 22.2

Important 29 3.7

Very Important 9 16.7

24. Sunday School Teacher Training

Not Important 8 14.8

Slightly Important 22 40.7

Important 18 33.3

Very Important 6 11.1

25. Training in Disciple Making

Not Important 4 7.5

Slightly Important 16 30.2

Important 19 35.8

Very Important 14 26.4

26. Small Group Leader Training

Not Important 5 9.1

Slightly Important 17 30.9

Important 23 41.8

Very Important 10 18.2

27. Youth and Children’s Support Worker Training

Not Important 1 1.9

Slightly Important 18 33.3

Important 26 48.1

Very Important 9 16.7

28. Training in WMU/Women’s Ministries

Not Important 8 14.5

Slightly Important 19 34.5

Important 21 38.2

Very Important 7 12.7

29. VBS Worker Training

Not Important 11 20.0

Slightly Important 24 43.6

Important 16 29.1

Very Important 4 7.3

30. Technology and Website Consultation

Not Important 7 12.7

Slightly Important 11 20.0

Important 27 49.1

Very Important 10 18.2

31. Search Committee Training / Consulting

Not Important 5 9.3

Slightly Important 23 42.6

Important 17 31.5

Very Important 9 16.7

32. Visitor Hospitality / First Impressions Training

Not Important 5 9.3

Slightly Important 23 42.6

Important 19 35.2

Very Important 7 13.0

33. Deacon / Elder Training

Not Important 9 16.7

Slightly Important 20 37.0

Important 15 27.8

Very Important 10 18.5

34. Ordination Assistance

Not Important 16 29.6

Slightly Important 19 35.2

Important 16 29.6

Very Important 3 5.6

35. Senior Adult Ministry Consultation / Training

Not Important 10 18.5

Slightly Important 21 38.9

Important 18 33.3

Very Important 5 9.3

36. Conflict Resolution

Not Important 7 13.0

Slightly Important 12 22.2

Important 24 44.4

Very Important 11 20.4

37. Worship Training for Leaders of Praise Bands / Choirs

Not Important 16 29.6

Slightly Important 25 46.3

Important 8 14.8

Very Important 5 9.3

38 Computer error. There was no question 38.

**Please rate the effectiveness of the following:**

Not effective, somewhat effective, effective, very effective, don’t know

39. Fall Church Leadership Conference

Not effect 1 1.9%

Somewhat effective 11 20.8

Effective 8 15.1

Very Effective 3 5.7

Don’t know 30 56.6

40 Raceway Ministry

Not effective 7 13.2

Somewhat effective 8 15.1

Effective 9 17.0

Very Effective 5 9.4

Don’t know 24 45.3

41 Camp Alkulana

Not effective 0 0

Somewhat effective 3 5.7

Effective 6 11.3

Very Effective 39 73.6

Don’t know 5 9.4

42 The RCFN Ministry Centers

Not effective 0 0

Somewhat effective 2 3.8

Effective 13 24.5

Very Effective 31 58.5

Don’t know 7 13.2

43 RCFN’s Monthly Email

Not effective 2 3.8

Somewhat effective 14 26.4

Effective 16 30.2

Very Effective 11 20.8

Don’t know 10 18.9

44. In order of importance, please list the top 3 skill-sets that are needed in the next RCFN director who can lead our Network to reach its full potential.

(Because the responses were so varied and random, what follows is the actual wording, rather than grouping the responses according to categories. No importance should be attributed to the order in the following listing. Also, the responses below are from the wordings of the respondents, who did not always list skill-sets.)

Capital Fund Raiser for Centers

Help churches deal with political divide

Leadership

Bold

Visionary, not perpetuating the past

Out-come driven not

Experienced in vision casting

Knowledgeable promoter of the Association, Centers, and Camp

Listener who can find common ground

Working for social justice in the community and assisting churches to do the same

Grant writing

Stewardship / Generosity

Community Peacemaking and Justice

Administration, ministering to ministers, and communication

Ministry centers, Camp Alkulana, monthly contact with all

Leadership, good speaking voice, visit churches and encourage pastors

Forge unity and cooperation

Think outside the box

Creative, forward-thinking; has a vision for what associational ministry should be in the future,

rather than the past. Avoids the misogyny of the church of the past (and still the present, if ware are honest); authentic and enjoys connecting with people and building partnerships (not in a fake, disingenuous way, but one that builds meaningful connections and partnerships.

Leadership, highly regarded, visionary

Fall Church Leadership Conference

Deals with declining church membership, conflict resolution, and innovative worship

Committed to currents ministries of Camp and Centers

Guides personnel, personable and approachable, infuses energy and excitement; to vision

what is next, not rebuild what is old

Navigating justice issues; reaching out to all churches, fundraising;

Able to develop and articulate missions and programs; organizational skills, strong

communication with churches

Communication to diverse groups; a balanced biblical perspective on gospel presentation and

social gospel; budgeting and stewardship expertise

Ministry Centers, Camp Alkulana

Knows and loves our city; knows and loves our churches, help our churches love our city in

ways that make a real difference

Respect and support for ALL Baptist congregations, especially focusing on “the least of these”

enhancing ministry Centers and Camp Alkulana

Vision for the future, coalition building, emotional intelligence

Encourages diversity and inclusiveness in RFN and its member organizations, open to and

effective motivating change, responsive to the leading of the Holy Spirit

Strong leader, can engager with multi-ethnic environment, well-versed in technology

Charisma, public speaking and an open mind to new ideas.

Coach/guide of ministry centers and camp. Fundraiser. Relationship and resource provider for

churches

Understanding the history of Richmond and the faith communities that thrive here; focus on

building community, focus on inclusivity

Ability to help churches chart new paths post-covid, helping churches that can’t do this merge

or close, getting the church out into the community and involved in social ministries

Personable / reachable; prayerful; outreaching – visit, visit, visit

Leadership, service, enthusiasm

Ability to review, tweak and/or change what is or is not working in our ministries outreach,

education; seek His direction first; encourage others to do the same – to galvanize “new troops”

Knowledge of the needs in the Richmond community; interested in and excited about the work

that is being done in the centers and Camp Alkulana; vision to grow and nurture the above programs

Creative, Tech-savvy; budget skills

Ability to vision regionally. What can a group of churches do together that one church cannot

do alone? Ability to help churches find new ways of being God’s presence in Richmond, beyond just traditional worship (But keeping traditional worship for those of who need it!!); Ability to help churches merge or close with dignity

Pastoral experience, understanding of future church dynamics; appreciation of theological

differences.

Ability to reach out to different congregations, people, and needs. Ability to organize and deal

with multiple projects / programs at once (energy and ability to prioritize); Maturity (have some ministry experience of at least 2 – 5 years, preferably in more than one setting / location and willingness to mediate disputes.

Biblical, multicultural, scholar; excellent multi-dimensional communicator; agape love for God’s

earth and humanity

Not sure if you need a full-time director of missions

Communication; social justice; integrity.

Heart for mission work; proven track record of leading / managing Christian organizations;

ability to work with wide range of people /personalities

Compassionate heart; more focus on ministry than on self; administrative ability

Encourage churches to be more evangelistic – a top priority is reaching the lost; encourage

weak churches to grow rather than close; supports the ministries within RFN and can advocate for their staff.

Strong supportive supervisory for existing programs and staff; have a dedication to and

understanding of intersectional / diverse/inclusive/antiracist ministry

Passion for the people of God; visionary for churches post pandemic; ability to work with

diverse church sizes and congregations

45 Other Comments

* + Consider someone much younger, more visionary, with a missionary spirit, not a glad hander waiting for retirement
  + The work that the Centers and Camp do is currently where we spend a lot of money and time. We need to make this work more cohesive. Perhaps broaden our reach to other physical areas of the Association. There are many things that the various churches can do better together. I would like to see the Association make a bigger effort on pooling our resources, our interests, our conversations, all that we have individually to make a stronger group.
  + Need new ways to get people to take part in the RCFN activities and committee work. The volunteers are from a very small segment of churches. How to decide who can lead from what church needs to be reviewd and changed so that people feel it an honor to be a part of the RCFN and what it is doing for the churches and the community.
  + We need a good leader who also gives out jobs to us so he/she doesn’t have to do it all. Someone who knows the Richmond/counties area, can work with the churches. Also, a loving caring person.
  + RCFN is still predominately white…any interest in finding a way to build bridges with Hispanic churches? Southern Baptists are rapidly losing membership. Need to understand why.
  + Not a polarizing figure but one who is reconciler and unifier, with a loving spirit.
  + Be sure to do your homework and find out everything you possibly can to be sure your candidate is a good fit for RCFN Executive.
  + I am not sure an Executive is needed. It seems to me that if the RCFN has a strong Personnel team to lead our excellent Center and Camp Directors, that may be all that is needed. Free up more resources for ministry. If the three associations continue doing the training together, that is not a hat that is needed by a paid Exec. BGAV or CBF provide the needed training for pastor staff searches. I just don’t see that this is a full time position and can a part-time person supervise 4 full time staff people? I think that can be done by capable lay leadership. Each of the centers has a team they work with and the same is true for the Camp.
  + I know this is a touch job because each church has different needs and different personalities. Thank you for your work in helping to pull the churches together to work as a team.
  + I would consider that RFN reconsider its affiliation with the Southern Baptist Convention.
  + You have done excellent searches in the past and I am sure you will do your best for our Faith Network.
  + I think someone who would call me up and say, “Hey, let me bring you a cup of coffee and a doughnut, and then let’s take thirty minutes to walk through your building and let you tell me how things are going for you,” would be a blessing. If that person did that for every pastor, chances are good that he or she would get to know the churches, their leaders, and their challenges, and begin to thin of good ways to meet the needs of the RCFN.
  + Someone who is not a toady to the SBC.
  + Praying for you and with you.
  + Need deeper relationship and cooperative ministry across Central VA / Greater Richmond Baptist organizations.
  + In my opinion, the way that RCFN is structured and does business is confusing and needs to be streamlined. What is the clear identity of the RBA?RCFN? What is it’s purpose? How can it move on from the division of the ordination issue that created such hurt? How can it truly help existing partner churches to reclaim their calling and experience a renewed vision for the association and the Richmond area?
  + Bolstering the ministries and helping churches connect with them feels key. Training is something that happens more and readily with the internet.
  + The RCFN needs to be straightforward with its position (theology)on some of our current national/global issues (racism, injustice gay, disease, marriage, etc.).
  + I would give serious consideration to how to make this position part-time in order to give more ministry dollars to the Centers and Camp Alkulana. If I’m not mistaken, Bob Perry changed the title from Executive Director to Missions Team Leader. When that title changed back to Executive Director, we took a step back in how we view this position—as an administrative person rather than a missions leader. That’s vey unfortunate, in my opinion.
  + Prefer a seminary grad, with experience.
  + My rating of level of importance of RCFN activities is probably biased in part on what my church needs/already has with lots of resources. I do not feel qualified to rank the needs of smaller churches and hope that might be taken into consideration in some way when my answers are tabulated.
  + I would hope that the new executive would see the need and the benefit of the camp. I would hope that he/she would be open to Beth Wright’s expertise and visions for the Camp.
  + We all need to pray.
  + Know that we are praying for and with you.

**Appendix 2**

**Research / Interviews / Meeting**

55 responses to survey

Attended RCFN Board of Director’s meeting

Zoom roundtable discussion for anyone interested

Attended RCFN staff meeting

Interview with Wesley Garrett and tour of Southside ministry center

Interview of Alkulana Support Team meeting on Zoom

Interview of Oregon Hill Support Team meeting at Pine Street Baptist Church

Interview of Church Hill Wellness Center Director, Glinda Ford

Additional Conversations / Interviews

1 conversation, Rick Curtis, Assistant to the President for Convention and

Associational Relationships, North American Mission Board, SBC

1 conversation, Sam Bass, Assistant to the President for Convention and

Associational Relationships, North American Mission Board, SBC

### 1 interview with Dr. Robert Perry, Executive Missions Team Leader, Richmond

### Baptist Association, 1997 - 2004

1 Interview Rev. Pete DuPlessis, Executive Missions Team Leader, Richmond

Richmond Baptist Association, 2005 - 2010

3 email invitations sent to past director, Mike Robinson, responded but declined

to participate.

3 separate interviews with three key leaders of Bon Air Baptist Church

1 interview with River Road Baptist key leader

1 Interview with current leader of WMU of Virginia

1 conversation with former Executive Director of District of Columbia Baptist

Convention

2 conversations with church revitalization national leader

1 interview of Executive Director of “Connect Nashville Project”

1 conversation with major leader of the Lynchburg Baptist Association’s transition

away from a paid director of missions to management and leadership of the association through committees and teams

1 conversation with church health leader, Northwest Baptist Convention,

Vancouver WA.

1 interview with founder and leader of Bridging RVA, a non-profit that connects

individuals, groups and causes in the Richmond area to advance common good efforts in communities and city of Richmond.

19 associations contacted for information regarding ministries to ethnics,

ministries through association-owned camps, ministry centers, and salary ranges. (Not every association was asked to provide information in each of these areas.)

1 conversation with RCFN interim treasurer

Multiple conversations with the current interim Executive Director of RCFN

**Appendix 3**

**Models and Options for Managing and Leading the Network**

(Listed in no particular order. Aspects of some models may be combined)

1. **Committee – Led Network with a Paid Executive Assistant**

Under this model, the Network does not have a paid leader. The ministry is managed completely by volunteers. Often this model will include a central committee and other subcommittees. Many smaller associations have gone to this approach, primarily because they no longer could employ a salaried executive leader.

Important to making this model work, is a paid office executive assistant who normally is the first point of contact and also facilitates the work of the various committees.

Fredericksburg Area Baptist Network now uses this model and Appendix 4 is taken from that Network’s bylaws which explains its organization structure.

The leadership of the Lynchburg Baptist Association also transitioned to this type of model. A key leader, who was involved in leading the transition away from a paid executive, expressed that it took a little while for the churches to adjust to the changes but that it now works well.

It is the opinion of the writer of this report that this model would not work well for the River City Faith Network because of the number of paid employees and that associations that use this model usually only maintain their ministries and do not make any significant advances.

1. **Part-time Executive Director with part-time paid Executive Assistant**

Under this model, the Executive Director manages the basic, core duties relating to the churches and oversees the managerial aspects of the Network. A strong committee system is needed for this model to work effectively.

Petersburg Baptist Association uses this approach. Because the Association owns and operates a camp, it needed to employ a director and not depend completely on the availability of volunteers.

The advantages of this approach is that it allows financially strapped Networks to have an experienced leader available to help churches and manage the status quo.

1. **Full-time Executive Director with Paid Executive Assistant**

**RCFN** uses this model and they have for years.

Appendix 4

**Example of an Association Managed and Led by Committees**

CONSTITUTION AND BY-LAWS  
FREDERICKSBURG AREA BAPTIST NETWORK

ARTICLE III – MISSION  
   
                The mission of the Network is to assist and strengthen member churches to fulfill the Great Commandment (Matthew 22:36-39) and the Great Commission (Matthew 28:19-21).  There shall be full recognition of the autonomy of the local churches.

ARTICLE IV – ASSOCIATION ORGANIZATION  
   
                The Network shall have a Coordinating board which will serve as the Board of Directors.  There will be ministry teams to serve the churches in the following areas: Church and Staff Health, Church Planting/Multiplication, Churches on Mission Locally, Churches on Mission Globally, and Churches Networking Resources. Other areas may be added as approved by the Coordinating Board or the Network at the Annual meeting.  
   
   
ARTICLE V – FREDERICKSBURG AREA COORDINATING BOARD  
   
                The Coordinating Board shall consist of the President, Vice-President, Secretary, Treasurer, Immediate Past President, and twelve members elected at large from the Network.  The ministerial staff of the Network shall serve as non-voting members of the Coordinating Board.  The President will serve as Chair of the Coordinating Board; or in his absence, the Vice-President, a chair pro tempore shall be elected by the body.  At large members of the Coordinating Board are elected to a three-year term and may serve no longer than six years consecutively. The Coordinating Board shall act in the interim for the Network on such matter that requires action before the next Annual Meeting of the Network.  Coordinating Board shall assist and give counsel to the churches and coordinate the work of the Network with the churches.

                The Coordinating Board shall submit a report of its activities to the Annual Meeting of the Network.  It shall be responsible for submitting a budget at the Annual meeting of the Network.  It shall meet at least quarterly.  Special meetings may be called by the President or upon request of three (3) of its members.  The members present at a regular meeting of the Coordinating Board shall constitute a quorum.