

RCFN Annual Meeting–Report of the Interim Executive Director

In August of 2020 I received a call from Cecil Chambers informing me RCFN's Executive Director Mike Robinson planned to retire at the end of December. Cecil asked if we could talk about my serving as Interim Executive Director. I agreed to talk about serving on a "part-time and not permanent" basis. Due to a family emergency, Mike Robinson departed earlier than expected. Executive Assistant Jo Ellen Schneider and I started the same week in December of 2020. We both had experience that has served us well and helped River City Faith Network, but neither of us had the benefit of overlapping with the person we followed.

The spread of COVID-19 had changed many things since early 2020. Jo Ellen and I discovered that the staff and leaders of River City Faith Network, like the staff and leaders of RCFN churches, creatively adapted to function using COVID-related practices. The ministry center directors had made necessary changes to keep serving at Church Hill, Oregon Hill, and South Richmond. Camp Alkulana staff could not hold camp as usual, yet found a way to offer some camp activities here. These changes also called for alternate ways of collecting items and new items to collect (e.g., masks, hand sanitizer, and more cleaning supplies). Even with a pandemic, those we serve have needs and we keep on working to help them meet the needs.

The usual ways and means of connecting to RCFN's churches changed during COVID. I could not attend worship services at various churches as Mike had done previously. We could not hold meetings at the Richmond Baptist Building either. Jo Ellen and I tried to adapt too.

We had some help from Mike (three time zones away). We also had help from Board Vice Chairman Bob Thompson, other volunteers, and other staff members. We transformed the newsletter with a new format. Jo Ellen worked to strengthen the lines of communication between the RCFN office, staff, leaders, and churches. With the help of many, we established a new office routine and discovered information that we needed to do our jobs. Jo Ellen and I also learned how to work together.

Jo Ellen has made the position of Executive Assistant her own. She has helped RCFN make improvements and changes to office procedures, equipment, and software. When we moved to the new office Jo Ellen researched vendors and coordinated the move. As a result of her efforts, we now connect with our donors more efficiently. She has assisted RCFN staff with their technology needs and found ways to reduce our expenses while improving our services. Jo Ellen has done all of that while working part-time.

Before COVID Mike had welcomed volunteers who helped with many routine office tasks, including copying, assembling, addressing, and preparing RCFN's "Transformed" newsletter for mailing. Without those volunteers we had to make some changes. I worked with Jo Ellen to reformat the newsletter. We contracted printing and mailing services. That increased printing costs but saved even more in staff time and office resources. In "Transformed," Beth and SaraAnne, Glinda, Jennifer, Wesley, Jo Ellen, and I share news and stories about RCFN's ministries.

More news and stories appear on the website which Jo Ellen recreated this year. By itself, this significant part of her work connects people with RCFN resources and makes current information readily available.

The RCFN staff returned to in-person meetings in March. I think we all appreciate the value of connecting at these meetings. I have worked with the staff to understand how they

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work together. As we work together and share our knowledge and ideas we make our respective ministries more efficient.

RCFN's ministries take place in the office, the centers, the camp, and in other settings. I met with each center director in their setting. I joined a group from River Road Church-Baptist that visited Camp Alkulana one day during a session of camp. With the cooperation of the directors, I have participated in three support team meetings and have one to go. The RCFN Personnel Manual calls for the Executive Director to conduct annual staff reviews. I did that and summarized them in a report to the Personnel Committee.

The biggest surprise since I arrived came with the decision to sell the Moss Side Avenue property. Mike had informed me about the contract to sell the land on the Montrose Avenue side. The buyer made a new offer to buy the entire property. As the Board considered the new offer it also weighed current and future RCFN needs. The Board negotiated a higher selling price and agreed to sell the entire property. After that, we had about 90 days to replace the RCFN office. Where would we go? What would we need to take with us? Who could help us with the move?

I called Fred Anderson *first*. Fred had served as the clerk and historian for Richmond Baptist Association (and Virginia Baptists too). The Richmond Baptist Building held decades of records and memorabilia. Fred came to the office multiple times before moving day. He identified records, photos, and other items of historic value to preserve and take with us. He also helped us identify what we could safely give away or discard. He even delivered a box of historic items to the Virginia Baptist Historical Society. I think of Fred as a living Baptist treasure, and I thank God for Fred and his priceless help!

Other volunteers helped make sure that we kept some of our treasures. Ruth Guill, Mary Palmer, Bob Jones, and others contributed their time and talents to know what to take, use, and display in our new offices. Bob Thompson reviewed financial records. Bob Jones helped disassemble and reassemble furniture and decorate walls with some of the things we brought from Moss Side Avenue. Richard Martin identified RCFN's new office space. I also want to acknowledge the efforts of our staff and other volunteers, including Jo Ellen's family and my wife Kathy. I cannot remember every name, so I apologize to any volunteer whose name I may have failed to note here. I want to emphasize the move from Moss Side Avenue to Emerywood Parkway required a *team* effort! Our staff team, our Board of Directors, and I thank God for everyone who volunteered. I want each volunteer and staff member to know the hours and effort they gave helped River City Faith Network.

Richmond Baptist Association once had many more staff members and more churches than now. It has changed and some of its processes should change to, including its financial processes. A short time before Jo Ellen and I started, RCFN contracted the bookkeeping services of Griendora McDowell. Like us, she did not have the benefit of overlap with her predecessor. Bob Thompson, Griendora, Jo Ellen, the center and camp directors, and I have all worked together to accurately account for the gifts that support RCFN's ministries. We have also worked to revise the budget and chart of accounts to make RCFN's income and expenses clearer and easier to administer. The 2022 budget shows that, and the new chart of accounts that goes into effect in 2022 will match it.

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A key area of my responsibilities involves working with RCFN's Board of Directors. So far, the Board has met seven times this year in five regular and two called meetings. The RCFN Board has five standing committees. They help RCFN have the staff and volunteer leaders it needs. They serve as stewards of the financial and physical resources entrusted to RCFN. RCFN's Board of Directors acts for the Network between Annual Meetings, overseeing RCFN's staff and operations. Board members have worked hard this year on a variety of tasks.

The Board members wanted an assessment of RCFN before embarking on the search for its next executive. The Board engaged with Middle District Baptist Association and its Executive Director Dr. James Hamacher to help with the assessment. Jim led a discovery process and reported his findings to the RCFN Board. Jo Ellen and I both provided support services for the process. Other staff members also cooperated with Jim as he worked to gather information and report his findings.

The Board also created an Ad Hoc Document Review Group led by Nancy King. This group examined the RCFN Bylaws and RCFN's Policies and Procedures. The Board has the authority to revise RCFN's Policies and Procedures and adopted the Group's recommendations. The Ad Hoc Document Review Group will continue its work in 2022. I expect them to recommend revisions to RCFN's Bylaws for consideration at the 2022 Annual Meeting.

We may remember 2021 for some significant moments in the lives of some RCFN churches. I attended the closing service of Leigh Street Baptist Church. I also attended the closing service of Chamberlayne Baptist Church and the joint service of Chamberlayne and Bethlehem Baptist Church-Fairmount Avenue. Bethlehem Baptist Church-Fairmount had just marked the passing Dr. Victor Davis, its beloved pastor. (Mike Robinson and I represented RCFN when the church celebrated his life and ministry.) Services like this have historic significance beyond the churches involved. I would also note that Southampton Baptist Church has joined with Woodland Heights Baptist Church.

In a year with so many unusual tasks, some felt more routine to me. I have served as RCFN's chief administrator and provided support and supervision to other RCFN staff members. Each of them has cooperated with me to help them and RCFN accomplish its mission as best we could this year. I came with a basic knowledge of their roles and a general appreciation for them as ministers doing the work God and RCFN has called them to do. Whether you look at Wesley, Jennifer, Glinda, SaraAnne, Beth, or Jo Ellen, each of them serves RCFN well in their setting. I commend them, individually and as a group, as worthy of the support and cooperation you give them in the duties to which you have called them.

The duty to which you have called me involves connecting with people. My duties include working with connecting with vendors (e.g., insurance agents, copier vendors, bankers, etc.). I have met with RCFN leaders and several of our ministry partners. I met with leaders of two churches about pastor search matters, helped several ministers and laypersons with their questions, preached in a pastor's absence, and got to participate in two ordination councils. I would guess that I have handled a few hundred calls and several thousand e-mail messages in ten months. The Board and I agreed to an average of 16-20 hours per week (70-80 hours per month) and at least one day per week in the office. With the extra duties required for moving the office and for the discovery process, I have averaged about 88 hours per month and more than one day per week in the office. I hope to get to more RCFN churches in coming months.

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RCFN could not hold its Annual Meeting last year due to COVID concerns. This year we have planned a meeting that combines multiple staff anniversaries, acknowledges Mike Robinson's ministry, and celebrates the Richmond Baptist Association's 70th anniversary. In the process I have had the privilege of speaking with each of the four-living former RCFN executive directors. RCFN has much to celebrate!

I am grateful that I get to use skills and experience God gave me to serve Christ with you this year. After a year of working with Jo Ellen and other RCFN staff, Griendora, Board members, and other volunteer leaders, and with the move completed, I have started to feel more of a rhythm to my role as RCFN's interim executive.

Any interim serves for a limited time. I trust God will lead you to your next executive by RCFN's 2022 Annual Meeting, if not before. The Board has named the Executive Search Committee which will soon hold its first meeting. Pray for search committee and the person God has already started preparing for them to find. Pray for Beth and SaraAnne, Glinda, Jennifer, Wesley, and Jo Ellen and me. Pray for RCFN's Board members and other volunteers. Pray for the people we will touch through each of RCFN's ministries in the coming year, including the leaders of RCFN's churches.

From the founding of Richmond until now there are many in Metro Richmond who have physical and spiritual needs. So long as God keeps sending us to help meet those needs, God will provide the leaders and resources to help our neighbors in need and the ministries of RCFN shall continue—during the interim and beyond.

—Steve Allsbrook