

Superintendent Report



It has been a privilege to serve as App Region superintendent since November 2022. My job description includes:

- Connecting churches and conferences with ACGC
- Placing pastors
- Developing and caring for pastors
- Resolving conflict

During these first nine months, the emphasis has been on ensuring that every church has a good pastor and that every pastor is well cared for. The following updates will bring you up to speed on this work.

Getting Familiar with Churches and Working with Search Committees

There are 67 App Region churches listed in the 2022 Advent Christian Manual. 55 are active, meeting weekly for worship and the ordinances of baptism and the Lord's Supper under the oversight of a pastor or temporary leadership if currently without a pastor. It is unclear if the other 12 are active or inactive. Some meet irregularly. Some function more as a bible study. Some may have closed or disbanded.

Five of our active churches are currently looking for a pastor, all in the Piedmont Conference.

1. Central AC Church, Lenoir, NC
They have been without a pastor for over a year. Floyd Boston serves as interim.
2. Dulin's Grove AC Church, Charlotte, NC
This is my former church. They have been without a pastor for nine months. Ron Thomas serves as interim.
3. Fellowship AC Church, Taylorsville, NC
Dave Ross will retire by the end of 2023 after 49 years of pastoral ministry, 19 at Fellowship. Their search committee is looking for his successor.
4. First AC Church, Lenoir, NC
They have been looking for a pastor for over a year. Guest preachers provide weekly sermons while lay leaders shepherd the church.
5. Tabernacle AC Church, Lenoir, NC
They have been looking for a pastor for roughly a year and a half. Gary Griffith served as interim for six months. Now guest preachers provide weekly sermons and lay leaders care for the church.

In consultation with other superintendents, ACGC staff, and leaders outside of our denomination, we drafted a new Pastor Search Guide in June 2023 to help our search committees.

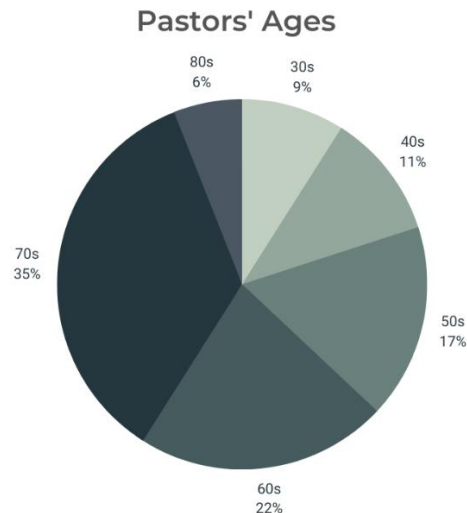
Please join us in praying for God to provide good pastors for all of our churches.

Understanding our Need for New Pastors

Our average pastor is 63 years old. Half of our pastors are beyond the average retirement age of 67. While this gives our region a wealth of pastoral experience and wisdom, it also presents a challenge.

We project 20-25 App Region pastors will retire by 2033. To replace these pastors, we need God to provide an average of 2-3 new pastors per year in addition to the five we need right now. This is urgent because we anticipate the bulk of these retirements will take place in the next five years.

We are praying and trusting God to give us the pastors we need. Long term, we are hopeful that God will raise up pastors for our churches through the Ministry Training Institute. However, our need is growing so rapidly that we are asking God for an immediate influx of spiritually qualified, biblically sound pastors.



In conversation with Leadership Development Coordinator Matt Larkin, we are focusing on two areas:

1. Calling people from our churches to train for pastoral ministry.
2. Calling our churches to embrace pastors from outside our denomination.

In both efforts, we must be careful that our urgency does not turn into desperation. We must not ordain or place unqualified pastors. And we must be careful when recruiting pastors from outside our denomination to integrate them fully through ordination and involvement in conference, regional, and denominational ministry.

Many of these new pastors will likely be bivocational. 53% of our current pastors are bivocational and we expect this percentage to grow considering the advantages of this approach and our declining church membership.

Networking for New Pastors

I keep in regular contact with my fellow superintendents and ACGC staff, especially Leadership Development Coordinator Matt Larkin. This has resulted in several leads, but not yet any pastoral placements.

To explore the possibility of recruiting pastors from outside our denomination, we have visited the following seminaries and found a warm reception and willing partnership.

- Asbury Theological Seminary
- Charlotte Christian College and Seminary
- Dallas Theological Seminary (DC Campus)
- Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary (Charlotte Campus)

- Liberty University School of Divinity
- Reformed Theological Seminary (Charlotte Campus)
- Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary
- Southern Baptist Theological Seminary

Our first efforts toward establishing relationships with these schools were through the App Region Preaching Team. This is a team of seminary students, graduates, or faculty who are vetted and qualified to serve as guest preachers in our churches. Seminary administrators have been open to help us recruit students and alumni to join this team of guest preachers to preach in our churches when needed.

The Preaching Team has several benefits:

- It is helping to ensure that our churches have Christ-exalting expository preaching in their pulpits, especially churches without pastors.
- It is providing a low-pressure partnership with seminary administrators on which we can build.
- It is creating awareness of our denomination and softening resistance to our doctrinal distinctives.
- It is laying the groundwork for potential new pastors to become ordained in our conferences and pastor our churches.

The team currently consists of four members, with five others interested in joining. They have preached at First AC Lenoir, The Rock, Tabernacle, Dulin's Grove, Hope, and Lone Star.

Caring for our Pastors

Sometimes we forget that a pastor needs everything a Christian needs, including prayer, encouragement, discipleship, and fellowship. It has been a joy to work toward providing this for our pastors. I aim to see every pastor at least once in person every year and to keep in regular contact. So far, I've been able to make several trips to each of our conferences for this purpose.

Pastors should feel free to contact me any time for prayer, resources, denominational information, help resolving conflict, and any other assistance.

There are frequent training opportunities for our pastors. In 2022, groups attended the Faithful Conference in Matthews, NC and the Feed My Sheep Conference in Winston Salem, NC. In Spring 2023, several read *A Praying Church* together and then met for a prayer meeting in Charlotte. In June 2023, there was an annual pastors' retreat sponsored by the Virginia Conference at Camp ACCOVAC.

Some upcoming opportunities:

- August 29-30: Replant Summit in Alpharetta, GA
- September 22-23: Expository Preaching Conference in Wake Forest, NC
- October 16-18: Shepherds 360 Church Leaders' Conference in Cary, NC
- October 30: Feed My Sheep Conference in Winston Salem, NC
- November 11-12: Faithful Conference in Matthews, NC

We are also working with a Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary professor to plan an App Region pastors' conference for January 26-27, 2024, at ACGC in Charlotte, NC. This event will focus on how to

develop future pastors through discipleship in our local churches. If it goes well, this may be the first annual winter pastors' conference.

Maintaining Communication

In late 2022, we developed a new regional website (theappregion.org). It includes resources for current and future pastors, information about the preaching team, a regional calendar, and the Superintendent's Notebook. The monthly email is the best way to stay informed of current regional information. If you do not receive it, please let me know and I will add you to the mailing list. Individually, I keep in touch with our pastors and search committees over the phone and with in-person visits where possible.

Part of this communication includes connecting our pastors and ACGC. For example, in March 2023, we held a Zoom meeting with Church Planting Coordinator Adrian Dixon for interested pastors and regional leaders to discuss what church planting, replanting, and revitalization efforts could look like in the App Region.

Looking Ahead

While maintaining the efforts outlined above, I would like to:

- Create pastoral fellowship groups to help our pastors build relationships with one another
- Spend time with our ministerial committees to learn how they go about licensure and ordination
- Work with our regional youth board to create pathways for the next generation of pastors to pursue training

Mainly, I pray that, by our next annual meeting, we will have secured good pastors for all our open churches and have several future pastors in training.

More immediately, I am looking forward to the 2023 Triennial Convention, August 7-11. Representatives from all over the country will meet to discuss our denomination's future. We will also hold a special prayer and discussion session just for App Region pastors.

Thank you for the opportunity to serve as superintendent and for your partnership in the gospel. I look forward to our continued ministry together.

In Christ,

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