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Randy M. Keeley
CB Mission Northeast

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**Hit the Bullseye: How Denominations Can Aim the
Congregation at the Mission Field.**

Reviewed by Randy M. Keeley

Borden, Paul D. Hit the Bullseye: How Denominations Can Aim the Congregation At the Mission Field. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2003. 144 pp. \$17.50.

In a day when many churches across America are closing their doors, one group of churches decided that just surviving is not enough. Success would not be defined by survival but by growing in average worship attendance by five percent from one year to the next. *Hit the Bullseye* is the exciting story of the turnaround of the American Baptist Churches of the West. In a six-year period they went from just sixteen percent of their churches experiencing growth to seventy-two percent of their churches growing by five percent each year.

Paul Borden is currently the Executive Minister of Growing Healthy Churches (formerly American Baptist Churches of the West), in San Ramon, CA, serving 215 churches in Northern California and Northern Nevada. Prior to this position he served as their Church Growth Consultant. His career as a church consultant includes directing the Teaching Church Network in Minneapolis, MN and serving as the Director of Church Consulting for the Evangelical Free Church of America. Borden has also trained many pastors through his positions at Denver Seminary (Director of the Doctor of Ministry program, Associate Professor of Homiletics (tenured), Director and Host, Expositapes, Executive Vice President and Academic Dean) and at Western Bible College (now Colorado Christian University). He served as a co pastor at Bear Valley Church in Denver, CO and as the pastor of the Bible Baptist Church, Trenton, NJ. He has a Ph.D. from the University of Denver, a Th.M. from Dallas Theological Seminary,

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and a B.S. from Philadelphia College of Bible.

Many churches in America have not only missed the mark, they are aiming at the wrong target altogether. This is not only true for the local churches but their denominations as well. The goal for many churches and denominations is to keep the institution and all of its programs going. Rather than being institutionally driven, the right target is to focus on the mission given to the church by Christ. Borden states: "Local congregations exist to fulfill the 'Great Commission,' while regions [middle judicatories or regional associations of denominations] exist to do three things: Regions exist primarily as catalysts for congregational 1) reproduction and 2) transformation while 3) helping local congregations direct mission dollars.... We believe that our region should exist to resource, broker for, and network local congregations" (31).

The bull's-eye in the target of the middle judicatory is the local congregation. The regional association exists to serve the church, not the other way around. The bull's-eye in the target of the local church is the unreached peoples in the community. In *Hit the Bullseye*, Borden shares the principles and the changes made to bring about this transformation in the churches he serves.

This transformation was brought about first of all by changing the expectations of the churches and leaders, and by holding regional staff, pastors, and churches accountable for the growth of their churches.

A second key factor in bringing about change is leadership at both the judicatory level and at the local church. Leadership is not presiding over business as usual but leading with mission, vision, values, and effective structures. "Leadership has at least one simple test: Is anyone following or not" (57)?

The third factor for change was the revitalization of the region one church at a time by conducting congregational consultations.

Discovering and developing effective pastors to lead churches in turnaround ministries is the fourth factor for change. "The vitality of the congregation is related to the quality of leadership provided by the pastor of the congregation. For us to create an environment of health and growth we knew we needed to raise the quality of leadership among the majority of our current pastors. However, we also believed that such an environment required us to recruit to the region pastors who were proven leaders" (105).

The final key for transformation was implementing effective structures that are consistent with the new mission, vision, and

values of the church and the middle judicatory. The importance of this step is highlighted by Borden: "The creation of new structures will never produce renewal in an organization. Renewal is instigated with a new mission, a compelling vision, and the adoption of new values. However, the change process is never ultimately achieved or solidified without the adoption of a new structure" (125).

The tremendous value I find in this book is the hope that it offers to established churches and denominations made up of regular people. We have many wonderful stories of new churches with superstar leaders that burst on the scene with amazing impact for the kingdom. But is it possible for the existing church whose best days are thought to be behind them to see things turn around? Paul Borden doesn't venture a guess or answer with a hypothetical yes, he relates to us how the Lord did it just a couple of years ago. This was Borden's goal. He writes: "This book offers hope to judicatories and the congregations that comprise them. It suggests the means of transformation and growth for judicatories and congregations.... If denominations have any hope for the future, it may appear as individual congregations, and in turn middle judicatories, are energized for mission. In this book I intend to offer principles, strategies, and tactics that enable our judicatories to move from a desire to survive to the evidence of hope, through transformation and growth" (13). These principles, strategies, and tactics are illustrated by concrete examples of what happened in Borden's region through a section in each chapter called "a piece of our story."

Although this is the story of the transformation of a regional association in the American Baptist denomination, the author takes care to demonstrate that many of these principles are relative to other denominations. He writes: "While recognizing various polities involved in different denominational entities, which affect the way judicatories conduct their ministries, I believe the problems they encounter today are common ones that relate more to leadership and changing ministry paradigms" (13).

The author also attempts to alert the reader to his underlying assumptions and biases. He writes: "As a context for the principles and strategies in this book, we make one basic assumption.... We assume that people leading middle judicatories must believe that the local congregation is the basic unit of mission in the world" (14). This basic assumption is repeated throughout the text and is key to his paradigm as seen in another stated bias. "My bias is that denominations will not be reformed from the top. Renewal works its way up from the so-called 'organiza-

tional bottom.' In fact that which is perceived as the "bottom," the local congregation, must again become the entity that is the focus that drives the denomination (27).

The strength of the book is the hope and practical help it provides for those who have wrestled with the concerns of a church or denomination stuck in the status quo. The principles and strategies presented worked in churches and communities that will remind us of our own. Tough issues of leadership, accountability, change, structures, power, and growth are hit head on. Borden's no-nonsense-approach makes one realize that the solutions he offers are not easy answers or a quick fix. But those who were baptized and added to the church make it all worthwhile.

Although the principles and strategies presented in the book will be helpful to both churches and middle judicatories alike, they are not systematically presented in a comprehensive way. This is due in part to how the book goes back and forth in dealing with issues as it relates to the middle judicatory and the local church. It is also due in part to the repetition of the themes throughout the book with some new information added along the way. For example the issue of how pastors lead is addressed in chapter one – a leader not a chaplain (20-23); chapter two – a missionary in a pagan culture (38-39) and the key to congregational transformation (50-51); and all of chapter 5 is devoted to pastoral leadership. In fairness to the author, the book is written primarily to middle judicatories; however pastors and church leaders can also apply many of the principle to their churches themselves.

This book was a great encouragement to me as a leader of an association of churches. Although I am wrestling with how to implement some of the principles in our own unique setting, it has helped to focus my attention on the area of providing leadership training for our pastors and church leaders and to empower them to become agents of change and transformation in their churches. It has also emboldened me to continue my role as a consultant to churches with the hope of being a catalyst for their transformation and hope. I have shared this book with my regional board and it has not only stimulated great discussion but has begun to shape the way we are looking at the future.

I encourage church leaders, pastors, seminary students, church consultants, and especially denominational leaders to study this book. It will challenge your thoughts, stimulate some insights, and fill you with hope knowing that Christ is still building His church (Matthew 16:18). May many more of us decide that just surviving is not enough.

Reviewer

Keeley, Randy M.: Address: CB Mission Northeast, PO Box 441, Nassau, NY 12123. Title: Executive Director. Randy received a B.S. degree in Bible and Pastoral Studies from Lancaster Bible College (1980), a M.Div. in Pastoral Studies from Western Seminary (1993), and is currently pursuing a D.Min. degree at Talbot School of Theology.