



18 March 2019

HOPE SEEDS STRATEGIC PLAN IMPLEMENTATION UPDATE

As Officers of the Hope Seeds, Inc. Board of Directors, we wanted to take this opportunity to provide an update to ministry partners, donors, and friends, regarding recent developments and future plans aligned with the Hope Seeds *strategic plan adopted by the Board more than a year ago*. Before going into those developments and plans, we want to assure you that we are totally committed to the ongoing mission of Hope Seeds to **provide quality garden seed and the Gospel message to the hungry and hurting in our world**.

As we move forward, we want to periodically provide you, in a transparent fashion, with information regarding both the positive action steps and unresolved issues, the joys as well as the disappointments, associated with this season of change. We acknowledge that you may also receive other perspectives from those involved in or affected by the change process and, as always, we welcome your comments and questions. As a Board, our desire is that, as we move forward, we do so seeking the direction of the Holy Spirit and seeking to align with His direction for the work of relief and development to which Hope Seeds is committed.

Our journey of change and transformation began several years ago as the Board and staff engaged in brainstorming and detailed discussions concerning the future vision and direction of Hope Seeds. Our deliberations were greatly assisted by the skilled facilitation of Pastor Timothy Fangmeier, retired Board Member. By January of 2018, the Board was able to adopt a new “Hope Seeds Strategic Plan – 2018” as a guide for positioning the organization for a new generation of service. This plan allows us, while holding to our mission, to best respond to availability of new tools and approaches as well as changing needs of the world’s hungry, while also preparing the organization for change as co-founders Mike and Jean Mueller near retirement. The five key objectives captured in the strategic plan are:

1. **Strengthen relationships** with key organizations for more effective and targeted service to the poorest in the world.
2. Transition to a more sustainable **financial model**.
3. Arrange for a smooth **transition of leadership** and optimized staffing for meeting future needs.
4. Develop and implement a **facilities plan** that will best meet future ministry and staff needs.
5. Develop a long-term, **sustainable model for the work** of Hope Seeds in providing seed and education to the poorest.

We’d like to comment briefly on each objective, both in terms of progress made and areas to be addressed.

First, we have moved to **strengthen relationships** with key partners by adopting a new “3-strand cord” philosophy for cooperation that involves a more defined process for our project activities like with our partner in Uganda, Hope Seeds 4 Souls East Africa. More work yet remains on identifying steps to strengthen relationships with existing partners, such as Love a Child and ECHO, and identifying new partners active in regions where we currently lack strong relationships.

Second, we have taken steps to improve our **financial model** including a new part-time staff position of Ministry Development Director, a strengthened role for the Board Treasurer in managing finances, adoption of new practices for receipt of donations and approval of expenses, and a redesigned budget tracking system. In all efforts we are relying for guidance on the latest standards and policy guidelines available from our accreditation partner, the Evangelical Council for Financial Accountability (ECFA). A work still in progress is a move away from the tent-making model of Hope Seeds first 20 years, in which much of our CEO’s time each year had to be occupied with the commercial plant sales business in MO and similar endeavors in previous years in FL as a means of income. We are currently in the process of clearly separating the work of Hope Seeds and Mueller’s commercial operations at our Show-Me Campus. Our goal is for the Executive Director of Hope Seeds to be a *full-time* ministry position that is funded in the budget and requires no side work to compete for time and attention.

Third, the Board has advanced a **leadership transition** for Hope Seeds through the recent appointment of David Balsbaugh as Executive Director, who had been recruited by Mike Mueller (see appended press release for further details). We are so very pleased to have him aboard to help continue the legacy begun by Hope Seeds co-founders Mike and Jean Mueller some twenty years ago. Dave is in the early stages of the leadership transition process, but we are already excited by the wealth of experience and wisdom he brings along with the next generation of vision and ideas he has for moving Hope Seeds forward. We are highly appreciative of the many years of service that Mike Mueller has given to Hope Seeds in his leadership role, and look forward to his contributions in the role of Director Emeritus until such time as transition has been accomplished. These are large changes for both men, and we would ask your prayers for David as he comes up to speed and for Mike as he seeks avenues for his passions and talents. To speak frankly, Mike has experienced some mixed feelings about the timing of the transition (he was thinking later – the Board acted sooner), and he and Jean also continue to grapple with heavy demands of the commercial plant sales business.

Fourth, we have tasked our incoming Executive Director with the job of evaluating our operations in Florida and Missouri and developing a recommendation for the Board regarding an optimized **facilities plan**. The experience of recent years is that, while the Show-Me Campus has proven its utility of use for commercial greenhouse operations, plant sales, and R&D, it has not lived up to its potential as a ministry tool of Hope Seeds. For example, nearly the entire supply of garden seed we provide to our ministry partners worldwide is purchased from retail seed companies. Thus, we look forward to recommendations from Dave as a “fresh set of eyes” for how we can best steward the facilities and equipment we have toward the work of Hope Seeds while evaluating the appropriate level of engagement with seed development and heirloom variety preservation.

Fifth, work toward developing a long-term, more **sustainable model for the work** of Hope Seeds in providing seed and education is a most exciting endeavor but still in its infancy. Again, this is a task which Dave Balsbaugh will be leading, and will involve careful study along with discussions with key ministry partners. In Dave’s view, we need to reconsider our *“services and evaluate them to ensure that the time and resources invested are not only having a real impact on alleviating poverty and hunger, but ultimately transforming lives... We must be actively looking for ways to improve operations in order to impact as many lives as we can, as efficiently as possible with our limited resources...we need to think outside the box, utilizing new approaches, new processes, by which we work and walk directly with the poor and those who serve them to gain a better understanding of the real needs.”* This process may take 1-2 years to come to fruition, and we eagerly anticipate areas of affirmation to “keep doing” some things as well as “adopt this new approach” for ways of working we have not yet considered – stay tuned!

Finally, in concluding this update it would be misleading to give the impression that, with the many changes occurring or being considered in implementing the new Hope Seeds Strategic Plan, everything is going as smoothly as planned, with perfect harmony achieved, and without a misstep. No, we are redeemed yet imperfect creatures working in a world still undergoing renovation by our Lord and Savior, and so there have been and will be growing pains. Some decisions have been painful to members involved and some missteps have occurred. We were saddened by the recent resignation of Programs Manager, and daughter of Mike Mueller, Bethany Matzke, who has not felt comfortable with the new leadership structure. We thank her for many years of faithful service; we love her deeply and wish her well. In any organization, moving from the “founder” generation to the second or “homesteader” generation can be a traumatic experience. In the life of Hope Seeds, most all of the Board members are now of the “homesteader” generation as is our new Executive Director. The current transition also involves moving on from a family-structured organization to a non-family-structured, more inclusive design. **We covet your prayers and your patience as we humbly work through these details of transition,** seeking the very best, and with Christ’s love compelling us at all times to act and speak well of our brothers and sisters.

Let us say in conclusion, that we continue to be very hopeful regarding the good work God has called us to at Hope Seeds, as well as in the new directions in which He may be leading us. If the first twenty years of effort, led by co-founders Mike and Jean, is any indication, then we have exciting, fulfilling days to look forward to as we follow the Spirit’s leading.

Yours in Christ,

Dwight Shackelford, Chair

Karen Pabst, Vice-Chair

Gary Van Dyke, Ph.D., Treasurer

Ken Racke, Ph.D., Secretary