

PATHWAYS TO PARTNERSHIP

how you and your church can join
the replanting movement

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foreword by Kevin Ezell

Pathways to Partnership: How You and Your Church Can Join the Replanting Movement

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Chapter 6

TYPES OF PARTNERSHIPS

In the world of replanting, a common mistake is to believe that there is a one-size-fits-all approach to partnership. This developed from some of the early innovating churches who had one type of partnership they repeated over and over with great success.

As we have worked with different churches, we've discovered many types of partnerships and are thankful that there is not only one-size or type. We believe there are *many* different ways churches can form partnerships, and we believe that each of them has their place and are needed. Some models of partnership do cost more for those involved, whether it be the stronger church or the weaker church.

The cost isn't always in terms of resource; often it is associated with identity or tradition. A new partnership may change the nature and look of a church—but we can and should expect that the mission and the message remain the same—

proclaiming the Gospel and serving the community for the glory of God.

TYPES OF PARTNERSHIP EXPLAINED

Type 1: Equipping

The intentional development of ministry capacity and skills from a stronger church to a weaker or struggling church through shared or site-specific training by skilled ministry leaders and members.

Commitment Level: **Low**

Commitment Type: **Instructional**

Commitment Financial Cost: **Low**

An equipping partnership provides the opportunity for a strong church to serve a struggling church through focused training in any particular ministry area with the goal of empowering them with the knowledge, skills and process or plan to move forward in a ministry area. This could take the form of allowing leaders to attend equipping events at the partner church or through sending teams to do training for the receiving church.

Type 2: Coaching

A personal, intentional partnership between the leaders of strong church and the leaders of struggling church where ministry

staff/leaders/volunteers receive specific ministry role related coaching.

Commitment Level: **Medium/High**

Commitment Type: **Relational**

Commitment Financial Cost: **Low**

In recent decades there has been an explosion in the world of professional coaching. A professional coach is one who comes along side and provides feedback and insight for an individual on performance related matters for the specific area they have been asked to “coach.” A qualified ministry coach is one who has experience and expertise in a particular area of ministry leadership and can provide skills-based instruction for a pastor, worship leader, youth leader, administrator, etc.

A coaching partnership may be informal or formal, it should be focused on a specific ministry area with clear assignments and activities and for a specified time frame. This type of partnership is mostly personal in nature and the members of the churches may or may not be aware that such a partnership exists.

Type 3: Resourcing

The commitment of finances, personnel and/or materials to serve the struggling church in its accomplishment of its ministry objectives and goals.

Commitment Level: **Medium/High**

Commitment Type: **Organizational**

Commitment Financial Cost: **Medium/High**

There is certainly biblical precedent in the sharing of resources from congregation to congregation for the accomplishment of ministry and to provide relief (2 Corinthians 8). Stronger churches often have an abundance of resources in finances, material possessions and personnel. A struggling church likely does not. One of the key aspects in a resourcing partnership is the development of a *true* partnership. In some cases a struggling church who is seeking a stronger partner may simply want the resources without the relationship. In some cases where there is simply an exchange of material possessions (chairs, audio/visual equipment etc.), there may be little need of a long term or involved relationship.

However, when the resources involve finances and people, it should be expected that there will be some level of accountability and responsibility for those resources as they are granted.

What we mean to say is this: a struggling should not expect to receive money and people without assuming accountability or responsibility to the resourcing church. We too often encounter a weaker or struggling church who believes that more money and more people will be the solution to their needs. We've not found this to be the case. In fact, if you de-layer the last few years/decades, typically what you will find is that the struggling church had people and money at one point, and over time made

decisions or mishandled crisis that lead to their decline. Often it is a decline that will not be reversed without clear self-evaluation and repentance.

It is totally appropriate for those making resources commitments with money and people to expect a level of accountability and responsibility from the receiving church.

Type 4: Merger

The partnership of a stronger church and a weaker/struggling church where the stronger church takes the lead as the two become one congregation taking on the identity and accepting the leadership of the stronger church.

Commitment Level: **High**

Commitment Type: **Total**

Commitment Financial Cost: **High**

The word *merger* is a business term that often carries with it the connotation of takeover by a stronger and the absorption of a lesser. As is true in the business world, mergers often leave those who were “merged” feeling as outsiders. In the world of church replanting, this doesn’t have to be so, but we recognize it is a frequent feeling and perspective. That being the case, the stronger church and its leaders would do well to honor the church and its history as much as possible.

Type 5: Marriage

The intentional joining together of two congregations for the purpose of greater gospel impact.

Commitment Level: **High**

Commitment Type: **Total**

Commitment Financial Cost: **High**

In this partnership, two distinct churches come together to become one new church. This could be any combination of a stronger church or struggling church, two church plants, or an established church and a new church plant.

Both realize that their individual identities will cease and they will become one new church. Like in a marriage, one may assume the name of the other, or they may combine their name in some way if they do not choose a completely new name.

There are many legal considerations to be worked through as one or both entities will need to be dissolved and one be prepared to receive the assets and obligations of the other or both will become part of a completely new church. We highly recommend you consult your local church law professional regarding the specifics of how to complete a marriage.

In some cases, it is easier for one church to remain and the other to dissolve so both may operate under a DBA (Doing Business As) designation from the state in which they reside.

Type 6: Adoption/Campus

The enfolding of a struggling/weaker congregation into a stronger church which typically has resident members who travel from the immediate area in which the adoptee church is situated.

Commitment Level: **High**

Commitment Type: **Total**

Commitment Financial Cost: **High**

Churches that have a geographical reach spanning several miles or cities are well suited to this type of partnership. A weaker or struggling church may find itself within the geographical reach zone of a regional church which draws people from the area in which it resides. In these cases, an adoption/campus partnership is worth considering. This partnership allows for people to worship in their community and actually increases their impact, as many unchurched or de-churched residents would prefer not to drive to another community to attend worship and engage in the life of a local church.

The congregation being adopted is brought into the family and shares the name, identity, ministries and all programming of the church by whom they are being adopted. Depending upon the governance style, the adopted church may have local leaders or be led by leaders who are part of the larger overall central church. This varies and may transition over time depending upon the structure of the church assuming responsibility for the local congregation.

Costs associated with building remodel and upgrades may be high, as often the adopted church has not maintained its physical property in the same way as the adopting church has.

Like the merger, it is important to celebrate and value the members and leaders of the church which is being adopted.

Type 7: Network/Family

A struggling or weaker church becomes part of a network or family of churches with a recognized ministry approach, philosophy and style and demonstrated effectiveness.

Commitment Level: **High**

Commitment Type: **Total**

Commitment Financial Cost: **High**

Although it has similarities with the adoption and campus models of partnership, the network/family model does have some differences. It is likely true that the church joining the network or family is a greater distance away from the parent church. It can be in a different city, county or even state.

A network or family church often has leaders who have been trained and equipped to be sent out to lead the local congregation coming into the family or network.

The bonds or relational connections with the network and family are kept strong and the local leaders are led by a local pastor who is accountable to the network leadership while local leaders are being raised up and installed into leadership.

Type 8: Replant⁴

The process in which members of a church facing imminent closure discern God's leadership to dissolve their current ministry and work with other churches or denominational bodies to begin a new church for a new season of ministry in their community.

Commitment Level: **High**

Commitment Type: **Total**

Commitment Financial Cost: **High**

This model of partnership carries with it both the greatest risk and opportunity for reward. In a replant, the members determine to dissolve the church as it has been, not knowing what will be like in the future. The decision to replant may come before partners have been identified or recruited. A replant may not yet have a pastor called to lead them as they move forward.

Every replant requires partners, and every replant is hungry for resources. The investment by the local association, state convention or national denomination is key in that they serve the local congregation by guiding, encouraging and providing counsel as next steps are taken.

A replant starts over or begins again with new leaders, a new decision making process and a new qualified and called pastor who will lead them forward. This means that members have agreed to put everything on the table and hold all things loosely so that their church may be truly replanted for God's glory.

Replanting this way is a high-risk endeavor, but it is one which can bring about the renewal of a vital Gospel outpost in the community.

BEING HUMBLE AND SERVANT-HEARTED

Good leaders have the gifting and ability to see things as they are, and possess the clear vision of how things could and should be. Great leaders are those who know how to lead the people from where they are to where God wants them to be. Great leaders know that even in the face of fear and uncertainty, God can always be trusted to do what is right and good.

A recurring theme in Jesus' teaching on leadership involved some things that seem to be lacking in some leaders' lives today: humility and servant-heartedness.

Guiding struggling churches to consider their future is one of the most challenging aspects of the ministry assignment that God has granted us. There are times when our vision is clear and our hearts are emboldened to speak the truth plainly, and there are moments when that is tempered by the whisper of the Holy Spirit.

As you lead churches to consider pathways to partnering together, you'll need boldness and gentleness, and you'll need to adopt the posture of a humble servant.

In our fast paced and impatient culture, we may not value long conversations and personal visits to provide assurance and answer questions for the umpteenth time. We may find ourselves wanting to blurt out strong truth in frustration, but Jesus reminds us that we are called to be as wise as serpents and as gentle as doves.

In your leadership role, whatever that might be, understand that God is always working, and that it often takes abundant time for hearts to become softened and convinced to take a particular course of action for the future.

In your patience, do not let unbiblical actions or attitudes derail the partnership conversation. Be wise and gentle, but don't withhold needed challenges and rebukes.

Him we proclaim, warning everyone and teaching everyone with all wisdom, that we may present everyone mature in Christ. For this I toil, struggling with all his energy that he powerfully works within me. - Colossians 1:28-29

PATHWAY TO PARTNERSHIP

Partnership provides opportunities for the next generation of pastors.

About a year ago now, our church had the opportunity to partner with a declining congregation called United For Christ Church. This church was in a transition time where they had experienced some hard times; they did not have a pastor at that point and felt they were in a place of needing some direction. Through a process of meeting with them, praying, talking, and then praying some more, God led us all to partner together. United For Christ Church made the decision that they were ready for a fresh start with some new leadership. Together, we arrived at the conclusion that United For Christ Church would be replanted as a new congregation, building off of the past while looking ahead into an exciting future. This has been a wonderful journey for both churches thus far. It has not been all smooth or easy, but it has been a joy to watch God at work through this.

One of our pastoral interns was seeking where God would have him at the time this opportunity came up. Matt was interested in preaching more, so I encouraged him to go preach at this declining congregation sometime to help them and to give him opportunity to grow in his preaching. Little did we

know that God would end up leading Matt and his wife to help lead this new replant as their new replanting pastor. What a gift it has been to walk with Matt as he has shepherded the replant through this transition. He has done a fantastic job depending on God through this process! Personally, I have really enjoyed just encouraging Matt, praying for him, listening to him, and helping as I can. For our church, this opportunity has given us another avenue to think beyond ourselves, to serve, and to extend Jesus' love beyond our own church and city.

God is on the move everywhere! That has been one of the key things I have been reminded of by partnering through this replant opportunity. God is not done with dying churches! Several folks have already been baptized! Community groups have been started. Outreach events have been initiated. New life has been breathed into this church! Much is yet to come there, I have no doubt. Being a part of this replant truly has been a gift.

- *Scott Iken*, Pastor of a Partner Church

It is time for radical partnership.

We serve a mighty God. A kind, gracious and merciful Lord. And the truth is, our God has not given up on many declining and struggling churches that many of us would have given up on a long time ago. He loves these churches and receives much glory when bringing them back to life and vibrancy. And the amazing thing is that He invites us to be a part of it! The Lord is calling us as His people, as partners in the Gospel, to lock arms and fight, by His Spirit, to stop the trend of dying churches in our communities together.

In the pages that follow you'll find biblical evidence for church partnerships, practical instruction on how to partner, the commitments required of partners and cautions that could hinder partnerships.

"Whether you're at a struggling church looking to re-engage your community or you're at a growing church that wants to help, the time to start is now. I pray you'll take the lessons from this book and put them into practice. Together we can push back darkness throughout North America and around the world.

KEVIN EZELL, President, North American Mission Board

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