

PATHWAYS TO PARTNERSHIP



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

Authors: Bob Bickford and Mark Hallock

Publisher: Acoma Press (2018)

OVERVIEW

Pathways to Partnership serves as both an inspirational call and a practical guide for churches interested in supporting replanting efforts. Recognizing the importance of collaboration, Bickford and Hallock present a roadmap for partnering churches to assist declining congregations in revitalizing their ministries. This book addresses the spiritual, organizational, and logistical elements essential for a successful partnership, focusing on creating a thriving, gospel-centered community that supports both congregations involved.

EXPANDED KEY THEMES AND INSIGHTS

BIBLICAL FOUNDATION AND PURPOSE OF PARTNERSHIPS

The authors frame church partnerships within a biblical context, drawing examples from the New Testament. They note the collaborative spirit of the early church, as seen when Paul and Barnabas worked to support fledgling congregations (Acts 13-14) and when churches provided aid to struggling brethren (2 Corinthians 8-9). Bickford and Hallock argue that partnerships in replanting are an extension of the mission Jesus gave His disciples, where

churches can pool resources, spiritual gifts, and collective wisdom to strengthen the body of Christ as a whole.

Theological Vision

The theological basis is simple yet profound: church replanting is about restoring hope and life to struggling churches so they can continue their Kingdom mission. Partnerships are grounded in the belief that all churches share the same mission—to spread the gospel—and that struggling churches should not face their challenges alone.

READINESS AND SELF-ASSESSMENT

The book emphasizes the importance of introspection and readiness assessment before entering into a partnership. Churches considering replanting must evaluate if they have the capacity—spiritually, logistically, and financially—to support another congregation. Bickford and Hallock outline a readiness assessment that includes:

- **Mission Alignment:** Ensuring both congregations are committed to a Christ-centered mission and vision.
- **Spiritual Health Check:** Churches should examine their health in areas like discipleship, pastoral leadership, and member engagement.
- **Congregational Buy-In:** Engaging members to ensure they understand and support the partnership, as full congregational commitment is critical for long-term success.
- **Resource Evaluation:** Assessing financial resources, volunteer support, and ministry capabilities to ensure the supporting church can provide the necessary aid.

DEVELOPING AND MAINTAINING COMMITMENTS IN PARTNERSHIPS

The authors describe several commitments necessary for a partnership to thrive, breaking them into theological, relational, and logistical categories. These include:

- **Theological Commitments:** Keeping the gospel at the core of the partnership, recognizing that this effort is about God's mission and not personal or organizational gain. Partners are encouraged to develop a shared mission statement that reflects this.

- **Relational Commitments:** Emphasizing the importance of unity, humility, and patience. The book warns against pride and the desire for control, stressing that both congregations must view themselves as equals working toward a common goal.
- **Logistical Commitments:** This includes setting realistic timelines, establishing regular communication protocols, and committing to shared decision-making processes. Bickford and Hallock also suggest creating formal agreements that detail responsibilities, financial commitments, and resource sharing.

TYPES OF PARTNERSHIPS

Models of replanting can vary widely depending on the needs of the struggling congregation and the convictions, ministry philosophy, and resources of the strong church. Models include adoption as a campus, marriage/merger, family/network of churches, and more.

NAVIGATING THE CHALLENGES OF REPLANTING PARTNERSHIPS

Partnerships face unique challenges, from cultural differences to logistical hurdles. The authors identify several common issues:

- **Potential Misunderstandings:** Differences in church culture, traditions, or practices can lead to conflicts. To address this, the authors suggest open dialogues that allow both churches to express concerns and clarify expectations.
- **Financial Strain:** Replanting often requires a financial investment, which can strain the resources of the supporting church. The book recommends transparent financial planning, regular budget reviews, and open communication about any financial pressures.
- **Congregational Resistance:** Members of either church may resist the changes brought by a replanting partnership. Bickford and Hallock stress the importance of regular congregational meetings and communication to keep members informed, engaged, and spiritually prepared for the partnership's demands.

To manage these challenges, the authors emphasize developing a peacemaking mindset. They suggest conflict resolution workshops, prayer meetings, and other tools to foster unity.

CASE STUDIES AND SUCCESS STORIES

Throughout the book, real-life stories demonstrate how partnerships have successfully revitalized declining churches. These case studies serve as both inspiration and practical examples, illustrating how churches overcame various obstacles through faith, dedication, and mutual support. One example might involve a church that reestablished itself as a community hub, offering services that met the physical and spiritual needs of locals, and growing its membership by fostering deep community ties.

STEP-BY-STEP GUIDE FOR ESTABLISHING A REPLANTING PARTNERSHIP

The book includes a detailed, step-by-step guide to setting up a partnership, covering everything from the initial stages of prayerful consideration to the operational details of implementing a replanting program. Steps include:

- **Initial Prayer and Vision Casting:** Seeking God's guidance and defining a shared vision.
- **Setting Up a Core Team:** Assembling leaders from both congregations to plan and execute the replanting strategy.
- **Developing a Partnership Agreement:** Crafting a formal agreement that clarifies roles, expectations, and timelines.
- **Regular Checkpoints and Evaluations:** Scheduling reviews to assess progress and address issues.

CONCLUSION

Pathways to Partnership serves as both a manual and a theological meditation on the power of unity in Christ's mission. It encourages churches to approach replanting partnerships with humility, prayer, and a commitment to God's Kingdom, providing a valuable resource for church leaders aiming to breathe new life into struggling congregations.



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