



# BETTER TOGETHER



**PEER LEARNING COMMUNITIES:**

*A TOGETHER JOURNEY FOR  
PASTORS SEEKING **PERSONAL**  
**SUPPORT** & **CHURCH RENEWAL***

**DAVID JACKSON**

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# A QUICK START GUIDE FOR ASSOCIATIONAL LEADERS

## 1. DISCOVER THE WHAT AND WHY

- a. Read the PLC (Peer Learning Communities) manual:
  - “Introduction”
  - “What We Seek to Accomplish”
  - “Overview of the Journey”
  - “Why Together is a Better Strategy” (*Appendix A*)
- b. Adjust the model for your context and setting.
- c. Spread the word on multiple platforms (website, social media, newsletter, email, personal invitation, etc.).

## 2. PLAN FOR IMPLEMENTATION

- a. Read the PLC manual:
  - “Details, Details, Details”
  - “Enlisting Participants”
- b. Enlist and equip facilitator(s) for the process.
  - Modify and use “Enlistment Templates” (*Appendix C*) in this manual as needed.
- c. Set a schedule for the community gatherings.
- d. Download all necessary materials, including *Curricula Slides* for use.

## 3. WORK THE PROCESS EFFECTIVELY

- a. Read the PLC manual:
  - “Preparing the Process”
  - “The Gathering”
  - “The Follow-Up”
- b. Follow-up appropriately.

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#### **4. DETERMINE WHETHER OR NOT TO EXTEND**

- a. By the 4<sup>th</sup> session, have leadership and schedule in place to continue.
- b. OR, provide appropriate closure.

#### **5. DEVELOP A NEXT STEPS STRATEGY**

- a. Decide how to encourage participants to stay connected.
- b. Celebrate the end of the process.
- c. Announce opportunity(s) for them to stay connected.
- d. Check in on them occasionally and encourage them to do the same.

#### **6. REPEAT WITH OTHER PASTORS**

- a. Evaluate the experience and lessons learned.
- b. Determine if and when the process should be repeated, as well as who should be invited in.
- c. Begin the process again.

**ACCESS CURRICULA SLIDES HERE:**



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## INTRODUCTION: IN THIS TOGETHER

I've been in ministry now for over forty-five years. I've served in just about every imaginable capacity, from volunteer Sunday School teacher to staff member to lead pastor. I've been a campus minister at two universities, a church planter three times, an interim pastor in over twenty churches... and for decades I've served fulltime with our domestic mission agency, the North American Mission Board.

Yes, I know; I'm old! Well, maybe it would be better to say, I've been around the block a few times. As a result, I've learned some things that classrooms and books about ministry really can't address. And at the top of this list is the isolation and loneliness most ministers feel.

I will admit to you; this keeps me up at nights. When the apostle Paul listed all his sufferings and hardships encountered in life, he included, "the daily pressure on me: my concern for all the churches" (2 Corinthians 11:28). I get it; the struggle of churches is real. The heartache over interpersonal conflict, changing communities, and misplaced priorities, are common concerns every church faces. For pastors, though, the isolation they feel, the loneliness they endure compounds the weight of these problems. Whether they've experienced betrayal in the past, see vulnerability, as a weakness, or worry their discernment skills are not as sharp as they need to be, pastors often struggle to have close friends.

Some writers suggest they need—and in fact, it would be best—close friends to be a part of the church where they serve. Other writers say just the opposite; their close friends need to be outside, and apart from, the church they serve. But all writers on this subject acknowledge they need friends, just like every other human being on earth. We were created for relationships.

Somewhere in between the two examples of whom to trust in relationships mentioned above is the option of developing strong ties with ministry colleagues, usually other pastors. There are many reasons to do this: they understand the ups and downs of emotions that come with the sins and sufferings of the flock; they battle the same intensity levels of spiritual warfare; they can empathize with the stresses of navigating the messy journey with cantankerous church leaders; or they know the pain of

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*We were created for  
relationships.*

processing the sting of betrayal. This can be exponentially more difficult for pastors who are criticized for churches that are struggling and in decline, or at least, not living up to the expectations of some of its long-tenured members.

That's why ~~we created~~ "Peer Learning Communities." I define them as **a connected group of pastors in renewal church settings that gather regularly to provide and experience:**

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1. a safe place to share their heart
2. learning opportunities
3. community with others
4. connection with God and His work within us.

Pastors in renewal churches need a "safe place" to talk about issues and to tackle the challenges of a stalled or struggling congregation. They need to learn, yes, but they need to learn in collaboration with other practitioners who are grappling with these issues, too. They need to discern what is working, and what is not working, in the field. But they need to know they are not alone in dealing with their concerns. Others are dealing with them, too, often with valuable insights to be gleaned. In addition, and perhaps most of all, they need to know others are "there," that they care, and they will support, encourage, and cheer them on as they navigate this treacherous journey in church revitalization and replanting.

*Others accompany us  
in our quest for  
reclaiming God's glory  
in His church.*

This is also a soul care issue for us as pastors. As a result, this manual is an attempt to redeem pastoral relationships, based on mutual trust and understanding among pastors in struggling churches. It is a desire to help us find a safe place to learn and share, to trust and grow.

Why peer learning communities? Our hopes for the gathering of these small groups of colleagues are found in three main goals. First, we seek to **SHARPEN** the ability and skills of the pastors with knowledge AND experience. Second, we want to **SUPPORT** these pastors with prayer and encouragement from other seasoned practitioners. Finally, we desire to **REMIND** everyone involved they need not be isolated or alone in dealing with their situations. All these goals meet a need and provide something for one another that cannot be provided without the assistance of others.

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This journey is a winding road at times, where we are unable to see beyond the curve ahead or the obstacle in our way. But when we travel it together, we find strength and courage to face the challenges, knowing others journey with us. This makes the journey meaningful and memorable. It helps us now, but in the future, it reminds us of God's faithful ways in previous times. And we learn all the while that we are not traveling alone; others accompany us in our quest for reclaiming God's glory in His church.

Join us on this journey together in the pages ahead, as we overview a relational strategy, aimed at strengthening others to endure the trials and the triumphs of ministry in a replant or a revitalization church.

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## WHAT WE SEEK TO ACCOMPLISH

### HIGHLIGHTS

- *The Genesis emphasis on the Triune God in the creation of humanity*
- *The origin of the word “community”*
- *The conclusion: we are created for community*
- *The reason it is needed: isolation and loneliness*
- *How a “band of brothers” can help address this need*
- *Why learning is the glue to hold the group together, at least initially*
- *The power of prayer to connect us*
- *The benefits of such a “peer learning community”*
- *The strategy behind the content developed*

### CREATED FOR COMMUNITY

As all of us know, the Bible begins with God’s work of creation. After each of the first five days, God looks at what He has created and says it is good. On the sixth day, when He creates human beings, male and female, He proclaims it is very good.

Scholars have noted a couple of significant insights in this story that have bearing on our discussion today. First, the Triune God is active in this creative process. The Scripture says, “Let us make man in our image,” (Genesis 1:26) and while the “us” is sometimes referred to as a royal declaration, like that of a king, an overwhelming majority of evangelical scholars rather see it as a statement of the Trinity at work in community with one other.

“Community” derives from two simpler words in the English language: “common” and “unity.” The Triune God fully demonstrates this truth. Their organic “oneness” is the model we as the church are to follow in the lives we share together as God’s people. We are to keep the unity of the Spirit, for we are one in Him (Ephesians 4:3-6).

But back to the Garden of Eden. God says, “It is not good for man to be alone. Let us make a helper for Him” (Genesis 2:18). In other

*Isolation may be the  
Enemy’s number one  
tactic to impact your  
life and ministry.*

words, humans need others. We are not meant to be isolated and alone. We are created for community.

## A BAND OF BROTHERS

We encourage learning communities for this very reason, to address the isolation and loneliness replanters and revitalizers often feel in their church situations. I have often said this may be the Enemy's number one tactic to impact a revitalization or replant pastor in his life and ministry.

Notice, I said in his life AND ministry. Often, the Enemy will attack our ministry efforts with all kinds of potential barriers and obstacles. There are often interpersonal conflicts, systems dysfunction, sins and coverups from the past, outdated structures, and reliance on old traditions. But surprising to many of these pastors is the reality that the Enemy may attack their health, their family, their finances, and other personal matters apart from the ministry itself.

In all such instances, these pastors need a community of supporters, "a band of brothers," if you will, to walk side by side and arm in arm, through the challenges. As I have already said, we are created for community.

However, for many ministers it is hard to share openly with other people. They have learned that if they do this with people in their church (even staff members), they can experience betrayal. If they share with their spouse, it puts unhealthy burdens on her soul. If they share with a counselor or therapist, they may have been told it is a sign of weakness. Even other pastors, who brag about how well things are going at their church, may be seen as competitors and unsympathetic to the needs of a revitalization or replant pastor.

That's why these learning communities are so important. In a gathering of peers, all experiencing much of the same concerns and issues, albeit at a different time, participants can find support, encouragement, prayer, empathy, and wisdom to buoy them for the future. And while all participants will indeed be ministers, the likelihood for rivalry is diminished, due to the commonality of their situations and struggles.

## A LEARNING COMMUNITY

I'm sure you've noted they are called "learning" communities. This is intentional. The objective is development for all participants. The goal is to each one to grow in their role. But the reality is this growth will not take place simply by reading books or listening to podcasts. Learning takes place experientially among practitioners, who share their experiences one with the others. These insights are then evaluated and improved, because the collective IQ of the group will always be greater than the smartest person in the room.

In addition, there is an opportunity for this band of brothers to become more than simply group participants together. It is hoped they will become colleagues, encouragers, cheerleaders, and prayer partners for each other. The more they share, the deeper they go, and the more connectedness they will feel. These partners in ministry will truly arrive when they begin to connect with each other beyond the regular routine of the meeting

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schedule. This kind of comradery combats the isolation and loneliness they can easily feel.

Perhaps most importantly, the learning community prays for each other. They rejoice together over victories seen; they commiserate over losses experienced (Romans 12:15). They support each other in trials and in dealing with obstacles. They become the voice of reason and the heart of encouragement to lift these concerns with their colleagues before the Lord and His throne of grace. Prayer in fact binds them to one another in a unique and spiritual way that no other experience can. It is integral to the nature of these Peer Learning Communities.

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## REVIEW

So, there it is. In review, these groups are to provide:

- 1. Community to each participant to fight isolation and loneliness*
- 2. Learning for development and growth to educate and advise experientially*
- 3. Wisdom for decision-making from the synergy of the participants*
- 4. Support in good times and bad with others who have “been there and done that”*
- 5. Intercessory prayer and a care for each other beyond the group dynamic*

If these five things happen, we believe the learning community journey will be transformative in the lives of the participants, and even, in the churches they serve.

Finally, there is a strategy to the content participants will cover in their time together. From six units to thirty-four sessions, facilitators and students will determine the amount of content they cover in their meetings. Please note, these sessions, especially the first ones, are recommended in a non-transferable order. These sessions are necessary to the success of the group. Otherwise, if you jump into the middle of the training with a “felt need” presentation, you will result in a “band-aid” approach, addressing symptoms, but not the underlying disease or issue that is creating the real obstacle to renewal.

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## OVERVIEW OF THE JOURNEY

### INITIAL GATHERING: INTRODUCING THE PROCESS (ONLINE)

This session in by nature an overview of the process, and what that will entail for the participants. It is brief and short on details, as the topic suggests, but gives the potential participants a feel for how each session will happen and what the facilitator is like. Expectations are addressed and assumptions are dismissed that could derail participation.

If agreement takes place to move forward, then topics for dialogue would begin with these:

### SESSIONS 1-6: FOUNDATIONAL ISSUES

These six sessions are absolutely critical to the effectiveness of replanters and revitalizers, no matter what the obstacles and particular issues their unique church is facing. Do not skip these sessions as they lay the foundation for the remainder of the studies and experiences to come.

1. *Biblical Basis for Revitalization and Replanting*
2. *Earning Trust, Gaining Credibility*
  - 2a. *First 100 Days: An optional session for NEW revitalizers/replanters*
3. *Exegeting Community AND Church*
4. *Defining Reality and Assessing Readiness*
5. *Charting a Course for the Future*
6. *Shaping the Culture*

### SESSIONS 7-12: PRIMARY CONCERNS

These sessions are for the participants who agree to continue for six more meetings together. The focus here is on the primary concerns that must be addressed in a revitalization/replanting situation, not the systemic, programmatic issues. These

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dialogues cover integral topics to the well-being of the participants, as well as the churches they serve.

- 7. *Family Matters*
- 8. *Falling in Love with Jesus (Again)*
- 9. *Bringing about Change*
- 10. *Dealing with Conflict*
- 11. *Communicating Clearly*
- 12. *Tactical Patience*

## SESSIONS 13-24: STRATEGIC PLANNING

There is also a planned second set of topics for those who determine it is beneficial to continue the journey together. This section is in twelve separate sessions that can be adjusted and used as needed or desired. The focus here is on church systems, often seen in programming or processes in the church. While these may form the obvious and evident problems we see when looking at a declining church, they really should be **recognized as** the result of foundational or prescriptive elements the group has already discussed together as a group.

- 13. *Your Church System and Results*
- 14. *Making Prayer the Centerpiece of Renewal*
- 15. *Gospel Preaching for Revitalization*
- 16. *Pastoral Care Strategies*
- 17. *Dealing with Past and Present Sin in the Church (Spiritual Warfare)*
- 18. *Money Matters*
- 19. *Facility and Resource Management*
- 20. *High Expectations and Assimilation*
- 21. *Discipleship Pathway*
- 22. *Missional Engagement*
- 23. *Streamlining Structure*
- 24. *Expanding Leadership*

## ADDITIONAL SESSIONS (OPTIONAL)

These sessions are for those who want (a) to continue past the two-year mark as learning colleagues, or (b) to substitute one of these sessions for another mentioned above during year two, because it is more pertinent or germane to the needs of the context of the learning community. They could also be used (c) in a weekly or twice a month schedule, if you are trying to fill a full year long schedule for the group.

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- *Two Unspoken Realities Pastors Face*
- *Leveraging the History and Hidden Concerns in the Church*
- *Simplifying Church*
- *Start Something New*
- *Building Effective Partnerships*
- *Generating and Maintaining Momentum*
- *Engaging the Church in Mission Efforts*

### PLC FACILITATOR TRAINING

A presentation and session to prep and equip leaders to facilitate learning, sharing, and praying among peers with this curriculum. This unit covers what every facilitator needs to know to pull off the equipping necessary for the participants to bond with each other as they learn more about the ministry they are doing.

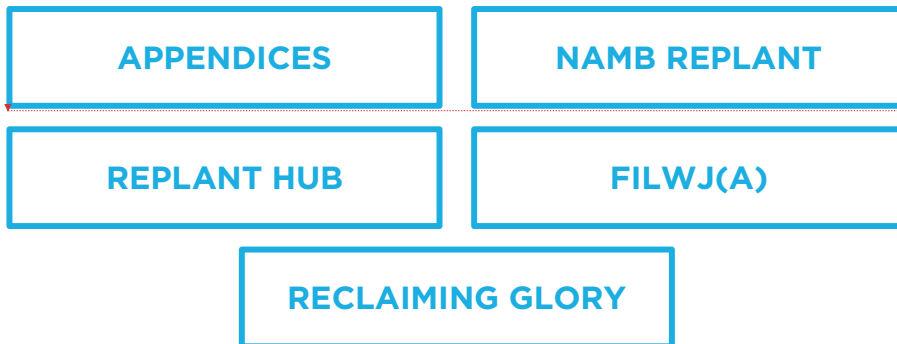
A brief synopsis of each session is included in the [APPENDICES](#).

In addition, [NAMB REPLANT](#) has abundant resources (inventories, books, blog articles, podcasts, videos, events, etc.) that can assist you in preparing, delivering, and/or following up with these sessions.

Other more focused resources on church renewal, raising up leaders, [FALLING IN LOVE WITH JESUS \(AGAIN\)](#), worship, preaching, and the book and study [RECLAIMING GLORY](#) are available at the [REPLANT HUB](#).

More of the details regarding logistics are addressed in the next section.

#### FURTHER RESOURCES:



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## DETAILS, DETAILS, DETAILS

### HIGHLIGHTS

- *Overcoming the hesitation of pastors to join a PLC.*
- *Group size makes a difference.*
- *Location options to consider*
- *Who leads the PLC*
- *How to use the time with the participants*
- *Why shorter meetings are better*
- *Textbooks?*
- *Homework?*
- *Curricula covered*

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### INTRODUCTION

Do you know many pastors of struggling churches? If so, you know they are typically reticent to share what's really happening in their life and ministry. I suppose we could psychoanalyze this and say they feel insecure, or have low self-esteem, or something else. Regardless, they are usually not eager to share the hardships and struggles they are experiencing because of their situation. It's an open wound, and it hurts to be vulnerable. But here's the reality: sharing openly is a key to healing and strength.

*Sharing openly is a key  
to healing and  
strength.*

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This is why Peer Learning Communities have been crafted as they are. With this in mind, we have structured our strategy to be supportive and helpful to every individual. The emphasis is on the people involved, not the program or the process. We want them to experience healing, support, encouragement, and help for the days ahead. The following is what we have found works best.

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## STRUCTURE

### Group Size

The learning community should be made up of no less than 3 and no more than 12 individuals. Eight is optimal size. The reason is we want everyone to interact, engage, and participate actively in our time together. A smaller number than a typical cohort allows the group to go deeper, and it provides less concerns for those who are sharing (fewer people to hear what I have to say). With too many people, the instruction turns into a lecture, and the participants can become wallflowers, passively “there” but not actively involved and sharing. This needs to be resisted. A smaller group is more intimate, and often more open and transparent.

### Location: In person or online?

Ideally, the group will meet in person at a neutral site, like the associational office or ministry center. This can happen if local leaders want to schedule it as such and have group participants who are close enough to travel to and from the office or ministry center without expending too much time. On the one hand, this approach is more personal and lends itself to more openness in sharing. You may be able to combine this experience with other associational opportunities and information, as well. On the other hand, it is more costly (fuel costs, snacks, etc.) and time-consuming (round-trip travel). It also requires someone to be in the building while participants are there.

The materials were developed with video conferencing in mind, so that the participants could meet from their own homes or ministry sites. This option has been useful for many in the past. If you do this, you will need a video conferencing account with Microsoft Teams, Zoom, etc., or something similar. These platforms allow you to share presentations, notes, and comments, in addition to the visual and/or audio connections with each participant.

### Leadership

The leader of the learning community is ideally an associational staff member, either the AMS or his designate. However, it is important that the person in charge know the leadership in a group like this requires facilitation, not lectures. The leader will introduce a topic of importance that all revitalization and replant pastors grapple with, then will lead the group in discussion. This discussion will focus not only on the content of what has been shared in the overview of the issue at hand, but also in the experiential application and praxis of this issue in the ministry fields where the participants serve.

The Replant Team at NAMB has individuals trained to facilitate these learning communities in their initial offering where you serve. The reason for this is to model the process and its objectives for you. However, the Team, if invited, does this only once, since they desire the field to own the work for themselves in the future. Their knowledge of the context and the participants involved make local leadership the better option into the future.

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## Time Frame

Each session when the learning community gathers should last about one hour to an hour and a half, at most. This includes a compilation of the following elements: greetings and opening prayer, a review of the progress made since the last session, the presentation of the topic for dialogue, discussion and learned application by those who have attempted it in their ministry field, highlights of the previous month [in life and ministry](#), both good and bad, by each participant, and prayer for one another. A final word of follow up will be added as the application assignment for the month before the participants are dismissed. This is all discussed in detail later in this manual.

Meetings can be held as often or as sporadic as the local leaders may desire. There is something to be said for weekly meetings in the early gatherings, or for the entire process. On the other hand, some groups may feel it better to meet twice a month, giving more time to process and apply the information in each setting. However, we feel the material lends itself best to a monthly application and was written with that in mind. You must decide locally what will work best for your group members.

In addition, you will need to determine the best time of the day for the group to meet. Should the group meet during the day, in the morning or afternoon? These are very good times for full-time pastors and ministry leaders, but not usually as good for bi-vocational participants. Should you meet in the evening? These times are typically better for bi-vocational pastors but may be more difficult for those who serve in active churches with fulltime pastors. You will have to determine what time is best for the actual participants you enlist to be a part of the experience. Perhaps they should help you determine the best time for them to meet.

Additionally, there are a few items we should mention in passing for those who will be creating peer learning communities for participation in their area:

## Textbook(s)

The Bible is the only text required for participation in these learning communities. Variations in translation by participants will help in the dialogue time together, so no one version is recommended or required. You can add a reading list for the group if you like, and you can even “require” reading, if you so choose. However, we have chosen not to do this, as most peer learning communities we are aware of do not do this. This makes the experience more “academic” in nature and follows an educational model that may cause some potential participants to eliminate themselves from considering the learning community (“I don’t like to read,” “I have very little extra time,” “This group assumes an educational level of training or competence I don’t have,” etc.). Our choice to not require additional textbooks adds to the differentiation these peer learning communities will have from other current options already in use, which do indeed have reading requirements.

## Shorter meetings

Most cohorts we are aware of have two-to-four-hour meetings each time they gather. This immersion strategy is good for a comprehensive approach, especially with those

who are new to replanting or revitalization. We recommend it. However, peer learning communities are created with the idea that the topics will apply where the learning is needed, not simply cover all the content. This is why the topic is introduced, but sharing allows the participants to speak to their own ministry experiences in implementing it, good or bad. The collective IQ will help participants learn experientially or vicariously from others who have tackled this in their own fields of service.

### Homework

Again, in longer, more comprehensive and academic cohorts we have seen multiple ways in which participants are expected to follow up on the previous meeting, as well as prepare for the next meeting together. This can be time consuming, especially to bi-vocational pastors, who have limited time, anyway. Moreover, it may end up depriving the minister's family of valuable time with him, as well, whether he is bi-vocational in his ministry or not. These considerations have led us to determine that the best and only assignment required of our participants is an application question or step with the topic at hand being implemented or addressed in some way back in their ministry field. The review of this application is shared the next time the group gathers.

### Curriculum

There is an extensive overview of these sessions in an appendix of this manual. All presentations have been created in PowerPoint and are available for download below.

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## ENLISTING PARTICIPANTS

### HIGHLIGHTS

- *Build a list of pastors dealing with isolation and struggling situations.*
- *Develop a letter/white paper to share and to invite them to participate.*
- *Share your intent to do this with the AMS/State Convention personnel.*
- *Ask for a commitment from pastors of at least 6 months (preferred) participation.*
- *Get back to those interested in participating with a start date.*
- *Be thinking of who a future facilitator could be.*
- *Invite field partners to observe/participate as you feel it best*

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### INTRODUCTION

If you are going to have success with peer learning communities, you will have to be able to recruit participants to join the group. This is obvious, to be sure. What's not so obvious is who and how you go about recruiting them.

We would discourage an "everybody's welcome" invitation; rather, (at least the first time you do this) make this an invitation-only group. This will minimize potential concerns you might have to address, but it will also mean you have determined and assessed the participants in advance who will be participants. You will be more aware of the needs and concerns they face, as well as the strengths and assets they bring to the learning community experience themselves.

*Pastors who get the most out of this see the need for it.*

### WHO?

So, who should you recruit? While some might say you should attempt to enlist those who are most in need of help before their church dies, we would hesitate...if they don't see the need or want the help. Certainly, a conversation about the state of their church situation is in order, and even some encouragement to participate for the benefit of the congregation. However, if pastors become defensive or resistant, we encourage you to

move on and wait on another time for them to join a group. Truly, there may be a need or rationale for you to insist on them joining the group at this time (e.g., the belief the church won't survive if they don't arrest the decline right now). Our personal theology and experience both teach us, though, that it is better for them to recognize the need and respond with more initiative. For these reasons—the conviction of the Holy Spirit and the recognition of a felt need—we'd wait for a personal indication they desire to join a learning community.

## HOW?

How do you find eager and ready participants? In the past, we have done it by presenting the need and the opportunity and letting them indicate by response that they are interested in being a part. We write a letter or email to hand-pick these potential group members and let them know God has laid them on our heart. We indicate the need we perceive they are experiencing and indicate how the learning community will address that need, if they are willing and interested in being a part. But we leave the response and intent to join [the group](#) up to them, as the Holy Spirit prompts and convicts them of the need or not.

You can find [SAMPLE TEMPLATE LETTERS](#), we've used in the appendices for reference. There is also [a WHITE PAPER](#) that overviews the process and the value it would bring to them and the church where they serve. We [would](#) send it with the invitation, so they understand the commitment they are making. Others, however, have chosen to vary this approach in a couple of ways.

[SAMPLE LETTER](#)

[WHITE PAPER](#)

## Pre-Select Participants

One way is to schedule the event first, then hand-pick the participants and invite them to be a part of the process. Information about what is expected and the parameters of the relationship and its responsibilities are still shared, with an expectation that they will agree to join, unless they have complications or commitments already that would keep them from participating. However, in this approach days and times for each session are not up for negotiation as you, the “enlisters,” have already determined a schedule thought to be best for the group.

## Take Volunteers

A second variation allows anyone to volunteer to be a part of the group, with an announcement of its intent. Technically, this would allow church planters and healthy church pastors to join for the benefit of the information or experience, not simply for those who literally are going through church decline or struggles themselves. This provides group size to grow, but all participants may not identify with the issues or

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concerns addressed. While either of these approaches may have values in a given situation, we feel the initially suggested strategy is better than either of these extremes.

### Host an Overview Session

There is a third variation we have made available to you, as well. Online at our [WEBSITE](#) you will find a link to a presentation, entitled: **INITIAL GATHERING: INTRODUCING THE PROCESS**. You may choose to invite or share this overview in a group meeting with your replant and revitalization pastors (or you could share it online with pastors who want to view it with you). By nature, this has been created as an overview of the process and what that will entail for the participants. It is brief, and short on details, as the topic suggests, but gives your potential participants a feel for how each session will happen and what the facilitation experience of being in a peer learning community is like. Expectations are addressed and assumptions are dismissed that could derail participation. If agreement takes place among enough pastors to move forward, then monthly topics for dialogue would begin.

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[WEBSITE](#)

### WHAT?

#### Commitment

Ask for a six-month commitment from the pastors you contact; get them to consider the need to be an active part of the group for the entirety of this time together. I believe this shorter time period has several advantages. First, all potential participants are asking themselves, what is the expectation and requirement of me if I join this group? If the value is unknown (and to most it will be, at least, at the beginning), they may defer. Also, if the time commitment is too long (in their opinion, not yours), their default will be to say no. So, our encouragement is for you to use a “come and see” approach, like Andrew did with his brother, as he brought him to encounter Jesus (John 1:41-42). Six months will give them time to develop connections and determine whether the group is providing value for them. In addition, the group will not have lasted so long that they will likely quit before the commitment is ended. However, you will have to determine what length of schedule is best for you to suggest to prospective participants. Do make sure you give them a deadline date to respond to your request that they be a participant in the PLC.

*The best participants are those who are ready to learn and humble enough to admit their need.*

Those who you have now enlisted are likely those who recognize their need and are eager to be a part of the group, so the value is self-evident to them. They are ready to learn and humble enough to admit their need. The result is a pliable and teachable peer learning community, who will grow in wisdom and find support from others in their ministry. It's now time to determine when to meet.

### Time & Location

I would encourage you to poll the group of eager and willing participants and ask them whether “morning, afternoon, or evening” would be better. Do the same with acceptable days of the week. Suggest the group will meet at the same time each month (or week, or however often the PLC will get together). Find the most acceptable time that fits your schedule and theirs; then announce this as the time the group will be gathering, with a start date for the first gathering for them to calendar. You may lose one or two who are unable to meet at that time, due to the complexities of schedule. However, even if they are unable to adjust their schedules to join the group as planned, you will be aware of their interest when you begin another PLC in the future.

### Future Facilitators

This should also cause you to start immediately considering the individuals in the group who could possibly be groomed to be an additional facilitator of another PLC in the future. Look for potential, interest, and insight as you pray about this. Then find ways in the early group meetings to mentor them, feeding them additional information, and encouraging them to take small (at first) parts in the facilitation of the gatherings. Their equipping and empowering to lead through facilitation can grow in the sessions ahead, as you feel they are ready. There is a **PLC FACILITATOR TRAINING** session you can use online to help prepare these particular individuals for future groups, as well.



### Association/State Partnerships

Perhaps it doesn't need to be said, but we'd encourage you to share your intent in starting a PLC with your associational and/or state replanting or revitalization leadership (if you are not that person yourself), just to keep them informed. They may make suggestions to help you as you proceed. They also have resources they can access to help you facilitate this process. At the very least, it will encourage them to know of your passion for this and enable them to be prayerfully aware of this process as they consider the bigger picture of God's Kingdom work in their midst.

If you are personally not the associational or state leader in the area, you might want to invite them to be a “silent observer” in the process. I have found it helpful for them to see and know what is going on through this ministry, but also to learn about its

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possibilities, so they can encourage its multiplication and extension to other churches, associations, etc., as they see the need and opportunity.

By “silent” I mean to suggest they attend but not vocalize their thoughts or concerns regarding the issues being discussed. I want them to observe and learn; I don’t want them to intimidate or dominate the time meant for the colleagues in these difficult situations. Learning the needs can help them follow up accordingly with these participants; giving input might keep the participants from participating, something no one would want to see happen.

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## PREPARING THE PROCESS

### PULLING OFF A PLC MEETING

The gathering of the peer learning community (PLC) group meeting is the focal point for community, learning, and sharing to take place. For it to be successful, leaders must see themselves as facilitators, not teachers. You are building relationships beyond the simple curriculum you are sharing; relationships that may last a lifetime. If this is successful, these connections will remind participants they are not alone or forgotten and that they should not give up, but stick with the ministry in tough times, because others care and believe in them.

For each meeting to bring content and relational value, you need to accomplish several objectives as you gather the group. On the next pages you will find some practical steps for you to follow for the meetings to help the group members make progress in their ministry, but also in their connectedness with others who understand and can support each other.

### HIGHLIGHTS

- *Pray for your participants*
- *Remind participants of meeting*
- *Review the material in advance*
- *Check content*
- *Check technical connections or room setup*
- *Contact us through [HELP@NAMB.NET](mailto:HELP@NAMB.NET), if needed for clarity*
- *Review notes from last meeting*
- *Build on what you know relational*
- *Be on time; give grace, but start soon*

## INTRODUCTION

Preparation is the key to your success in the PLC gatherings.

That's a bold statement, but we believe it to be true. To facilitate a learning community well, you need to take the necessary steps to ensure a meaningful experience for those participating. Our objective is to remind them of God's presence, His wisdom, and our colleagues' prayers and support. This helps them relationally, spiritually, and mentally, all places where the enemy will seek to attack them in their lives and ministry.

## BEGIN WITH PRAYER

Prayer for the participants and for the meeting itself is critical for the effectiveness of the gathering. This is true because of the spiritual nature of the event; you are equipping people with tools to fight the enemy who constantly is challenging us and attempting to bring obstacles to keep us from being successful in the work to which God has called us. Only God knows everything that is going on in the hearts of those who will attend. Pray that He is willing to use the meeting to draw them closer to Him and the work He seeks to accomplish through their lives.

Pray for empathy and discernment of what they are experiencing. It is true that a change of perspective can help in this way, so try to see the concerns and needs they must address from their viewpoint, not your own. Remind yourself of their level of experience, their maturity in Christ as a disciple themselves, and the myriad other responsibilities demanding their attention. Realize that fatigue and difficulties in ministry (including people!) can discourage, demoralize, and even depress them. Ask God specifically to provide wisdom regarding the issue(s) they face, hopefully mentioned in your last gathering during prayer time. Ask Him to give them perspective on the significance of the issue they are facing and His vision for the future. And don't forget to ask God to surround them with other supportive, encouraging individuals who will remind them they are not alone in this journey with Him.

*Know your audience  
and flex or adapt as  
appropriate.*

## REACH OUT TO PARTICIPANTS

Be sure and text or email the learning community participants in advance, to remind them of the approaching meeting. Tell them when and where you will meet. If it is online, include the link for connecting with the group. Also, make sure they have access to the platform you'll be using for the meeting (*Zoom, Teams, RingCentral, Google Meet, etc.*). Mention the curriculum content for the session, as it often motivates them to be sure and put in on their calendar and to anticipate the meeting to come. Ask them to let you know if they will be attending the session or not, so you can plan appropriately. This message is usually best sent about a week in advance of your planned gathering. But do not be too late in reminding them, as the rigors of ministry are many and they can easily forget.

## REVIEW THE CONTENT

Go over the content yourself in advance and familiarize yourself with the concepts shared and the open-ended question(s) that ends the unit. Make sure you “personalize” the presentation to be from you, including your contact information. Prepare yourself to facilitate this time, checking the content for clarity and modifying or adapting the presentation for your needs and context. If there is any “pre-work” that participants need to do (for example, there may be a survey to fill out or something short to read), tell them in your reminder to them, mentioned above.

A day or two before the actual meeting, review any notes you may have taken from the most previous meeting. Be up to speed on the prayer concerns mentioned and the questions or issues participants presented, so that you can build on them, and hopefully, move the conversation forward.

Be sure also to review a file we hope you’re creating on each participant about their family, their past experiences (as shared), their current ministry, both highs and lows, as well as their prayer concerns, so you can add relational equity to the value of the community interaction. This builds trust and credibility for you as the facilitator. You may even want to take a photo of the group, in person, or online, and then “cut and paste” the photos to the files you’ve created. Very few things add trust and credibility like knowing (remembering) someone’s name, and personal details about them.

## PREPARE THE PLATFORM

Technically, make sure you know how to use the online platform, as many items may be available for use during the meeting, from sharing the screen, to sharing files, to the chat feature, to the obvious need of making the presentation slides visible to all while you are facilitating the discussion and dialogue. Decide whether you want them to mute their mics when not speaking; this is usually best if the group is larger than a handful. And hopefully, you can expect visual connections with them all, as eye contact and body language will tell you who you need to engage and involve in a greater way. On the other hand, if you’re meeting in person, make sure the room is set up as needed, and you have all the tools (whiteboard, monitor, HDMI cord, etc.) that will be needed.

If there is confusion about the presentation and its content, or you run into a technical issue, email us at [HELP@NAMB.NET](mailto:HELP@NAMB.NET) and put in the subject line Replant & Revitalize PLC, then share your concerns. We will respond to you as quickly as possible.

*You are equipping  
people with tools to  
fight the enemy.*

**EMAIL**

## **START ON TIME**

Finally, start on time, so you can end on time. Certainly, a grace period of 2-5 minutes can be given as needed, but don't wait too long, or you will frustrate others in the PLC. Keep it punctual and help them realize the importance of starting when you say you will start. Everyone's time is valuable, so show it in the way you act, and you will be rewarded by their responsiveness. Two other things need to be noted here: if an individual is consistently late, then have a one-on-one conversation with him to ask him about it and how you can help him deal with it. Don't call him out in front of the full group. Second, if your PLC is an ethnic group, apply the "time continuum" accordingly. By this I mean, time is one of the most cultural of expressions. Know your audience and flex or adapt as appropriate in these situations with what is culturally expected or assumed.



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## THE GATHERING

### HIGHLIGHTS

- Greet all who join with encouraging small talk
- Overview the agenda
- Ask one *participant* to share
- Present on topic for 15-22 minutes (Scripture, BIG IDEA, Info with Practical Steps/Application, Principles at Work) *aligned properly?*
- Lead into Q & A
- Ask for “highs” and “lows” since last meeting (one per person)
- Don't interrupt group participants if they add their own thoughts to what *another person* shares
- Pray for one another
- Make closing announcements, including next meeting time (and topic, if you can)
- Include contact information for follow up
- Be more of a facilitator than a teacher!

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### INTRODUCTION

Meeting together is at the heart of every PLC gathering. The “together” part of the experience is what makes it a valuable addition to every participant’s life. The interactive nature of the gathering time allows for the synergy of the group dynamic to reveal new insights and provide support, assistance, and encouragement to all who are involved. It should be a meaningful time of learning for participants in their ministries on the field, but even more, a strengthening time of help through the collegiality of the “band of brothers” participating in the work of ministry.

### ARRIVAL & INTRODUCTIONS

When it is gathering time, be early, by at least five to ten minutes, in arriving at the location, physically or digitally, where the meeting will be held. Attempt to be the first one there, so that participants will learn you are available early for any personal questions or

issues they may want to share. Of course, these questions or concerns may not materialize, so engage in appropriate small talk, as needed, until all the anticipated participants arrive.

Ask them about their family or personal things happening in their lives (avocations, hobbies, travel, etc.). Steer clear of ministry until the sharing and praying times later in the gathering. This ensures others will hear and be able to add their voices of encouragement, as needed.

As you begin the session, go over the agenda for the day briefly and perhaps even review the progress made by the group so far. Address any urgent needs or concerns up front. You may want to pray for the gathering at this point.

Sometimes, we have taken the first number of sessions to have one person in the group introduce themselves to the others. This is especially helpful, if the group is large or widely dispersed geographically, so much so that they may not know each other. Give the “colleague of the month” five minutes to answer these four topics as an ice breaker for the session:

- *Their Family*
- *Their Ministry (how long there?)*
- *An Insight they’ve learned in ministry*
- *A Principle they’d like to share*

These last two are similar, and you may not want them to answer both, or you may have a substitute question you’d prefer. I encourage you to give them advance notice (a few days) that you’ll be asking them this month to be the “colleague of the month” so they’ll be prepared to share.

## PHASE ONE: CONTENT

Now, move into **phase one** of the gathering meeting, your presentation for the month, at this point. **If you are meeting online**, access the Share Screen button and enable the participants to see your PowerPoint. Ask them to hold their questions until the end, if they have something to ask. Part of this is simply the fact that it is hard to see the group members while the screen sharing tool is used to show the presentation. The other reason is to guard your time for the presentation. Strive to use 15-22 minutes (1/3 of the total gathering time) for the content you are providing. Include Scripture, the key idea, information on practical steps and application they can implement in their setting, and some principles that make a difference in how the content is applied.

This typically ends with a “how have you lived this out in your context?”-type question. The goal is to have them enter a dialogical, interactive conversation with each other on the ways this issue has been dealt with in their **own** context. Colleagues learn from each other, not just from the facilitator. This is a part of the genius of the “learning community” model; the collective IQ of those in the room, so to speak, is always higher than the intellect of any one person.

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## PHASE TWO: HIGHS & LOWS

When the comments have died down, then move into **phase two** of the gathering time: sharing what we call, highs and lows from their previous month. Usually, it is best to not discriminate between personal and professional highlights and lowlights, as one month a personal need or concern may take precedence and, in another month, it may be the opposite. The highs are something that has happened that the group can celebrate together; the lows are something in which they can join the participant in prayer. Depending on the size of the group, you may have to limit them to one high and one low since the last time the group met together. This should take no more than about three minutes per person.

*Drawing out of others is a skill needed to enable the synergy of the group.*

Take good notes during this time, as this forms the basis for the prayer time to come, and for your review of notes before the next gathering of the PLC. Try not to interrupt if group participants ask the one sharing to give more information or if they offer counsel; again, this is the learning community at work.

## PHASE THREE: PRAYER

Lead them into **phase three** of the gathering meeting time, by transitioning them to prayer. Ask them to choose one of their colleagues and pray for him and the concern(s) he has mentioned. Encourage everyone in the group to pray for someone else. If there is an “odd number” in the group, then you as facilitator close by praying for the one who has not yet had anyone pray for him. If there is an even number of participants, then you should close by praying a broader prayer over them all as a “band of brothers.”

## CLOSING THE SESSION

Before you let them go for the day, remind them of the next meeting time and the topic for that month. Make any announcements that need to be shared with the whole group and let them know you will be sending them the presentation in a follow-up email in a day or two.

Always have a final slide with your contact information on it, so they can find this information quickly and easily, if they desire to follow up with you soon about something they missed, need you to know, or want to talk about. Or put your contact information in the chat box, if that is better for you and them. I personally prefer to make it a consistent final slide in every presentation so they will know where to find my information if they need it, and can then, reach out accordingly.

## FINAL TIPS

Meetings can last as long as desired, but this can easily and consistently be done in one hour to an hour and a half with the curriculum provided.

Finally, a simple reminder: be more of a facilitator than a teacher. It's one thing to be an "expert" in the content; it's a whole other world to be immersed in the practice itself. Let them experience the wisdom of the group, including your own, but don't overpower the rest into silence by all of your own knowledge. Drawing out of others is a skill needed to enable the synergy of the group to build the objective of community and interdependence. Learning together is more fun and even serendipitous, as colleagues link arms and hearts together in this adventure of replanting and revitalizing churches under the leadership of the Holy Spirit.

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## THE FOLLOW-UP

### HIGHLIGHTS

- *Contact participants, sending the presentation and encouraging connections with others, including you*
- *Pray for them in-between gatherings*
- *Check in on them occasionally, as prompted by the Holy Spirit*
- *Remind them of the next meeting the week before*
- *Assess whether the group wants to continue meeting and go deeper relationally*
- *Consider forming another group*
- *Equip other facilitators to multiply groups through their own connections*

### INTRODUCTION

Much of your accomplished impact will be lost, if your follow up is forgotten, diminished, or ineffective. This “rear view” look at what the colleagues experienced is a way to reinforce the learning the group shared and to remind the participants they are not alone on the journey... both valuable thoughts to help them in the coming month.

### INITIAL FOLLOW-UP

Start by sending an email a day or two AFTER the gathering event. Doing this reinforces what you already shared (the content time), reminds them to be praying for each other, and forecasts the next meeting. Share with the participants (even those who were absent) the PowerPoint, and the date, time, and topic of the next meeting. Remind them that you are praying for them and available to chat in-between, if an issue or question comes up. Encourage others to do the same. Do NOT share the PowerPoint with them the day of the gathering,

*Much of your  
accomplished impact  
will be lost, if your  
follow up is forgotten,  
diminished, or  
ineffective.*

as the passing of time gives you the chance to reinforce the learning with repetition (a valuable tool for all students), and it gives you another “touch” on their lives.

Another word about the presentation: Tell them they can use the PowerPoint with their church or for their own benefit, and there is no need to give credit to the original authors for this use. They may also adjust it as desired for their intended audience. (They can even add their own names to it, with our blessing!) Of course, if you have previously adjusted it and “made it your own,” then you will have to determine if it is appropriate for them to add their name to your own modified work on the topic.

Besides this, you do not HAVE to communicate with them again until you send the preparatory message to them regarding the next gathering. However, you should be as responsive as you can be to them if they reach out with a question or concern. I’d try to get back to them within the day, or certainly within a workday, if possible. This leaves the door open for other conversations; conversely, not responding will close off most future dialogue with them.

## CHECK-IN

Feel free to check in on them from time to time, especially if the Holy Spirit lays them on your heart. A short text or phone call is always encouraging and reminds participants of your care, concern, and love. It tells them in a tangible way that they are not alone in this work, and that others have linked arms and hearts with them. This is key in fighting the discouragement and isolation the enemy attempts to bring upon them.

Regardless, though, of whether you choose to reach out spontaneously or, not, do plan to pray for them between meetings. Perhaps schedule this on your calendar with reminders to make this an active part of your own ministry in their lives.

As you get close to the next gathering, send a reminder email or text, simply to jog their memory. Usually this is done about a week prior to your next scheduled meeting. Use this message to share with them the topic you’ll be covering, and to encourage them of your prayers and interest in what’s happening in their lives and ministries. Ask them to inform you of whether they will be joining the group or if they will be absent.

*We tend to treat the symptoms of our struggle in churches, and not the underlying causes.*

## FURTHER SESSIONS

After four months, you will have experienced enough of the time together to get a feel for how this PLC is functioning. You may want to suggest the group continue for an additional six-month journey together. Share with them the topics you will be covering during the months ahead, if they continue. (They are listed in the Curriculum section of this manual.) Let them know that a decision will be made at the fifth gathering of the learning community.

When you bring them to a time of decision, some may desire to continue, and some may not. If you still have enough to bring about a group dynamic (3 or more), I’d

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encourage you to continue for another round of sessions. Those who are willing to continue may be those who need, not simply the information, but the connection with others on a regular basis. They may also be willing to be more open and transparent in the second—or third—series of sessions, as they feel more at ease and comfortable in trusting their colleagues on the journey with them.

This decision-making process can be repeated as often as you like, until all thirty-plus sessions are covered. However, it doesn't have to be repeated; you decide if it is worthwhile to continue and what topics to cover, especially after year one. The first twelve units are considered foundational, and often many of them are unaddressed in other materials, as we tend to address the symptoms of our struggle in churches, and not the underlying causes. So, we'd encourage you to stick with the first twelve as suggested but vary as needed if the PLC continues into year two or beyond.

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## NEXT STEPS

As the group comes to an end, you might want to provide a gift or some item of closure, as an indication of appreciation and affirmation to the participants. Perhaps a book on revitalization, like *Reclaiming Glory* by Mark Clifton, a gift card, or a certificate, might be in order. It reminds them of their value to you and is a tangible way you express appreciation for the investment they have made through this PLC experience together.

After this group has completed its journey together, we encourage you to see if there are others who now need to join a newly formed PLC. It may be that you have the time, the personnel, and the bandwidth to start this second (or subsequent other) group while the first one is still meeting. However, many of you will likely not be able to do that.

*You cannot continue to multiply this ministry alone without mobilizing others.*

## MULTIPLYING THE GROUP

Our encouragement is that you are not “one and done.” This is not something simply to check off a to-do list; rather, it is a process and a journey for pastors to experience together. Perhaps others will have heard about the effectiveness of the first group and be more eager to join the next time around. Other pastors may be new to your area and your oversight since the time you started the first group. Still others may have been invited the first time, but for whatever reason, their schedule did not allow their participation.

So, start a new group and revisit the process of enlistment mentioned in this manual earlier. We do not encourage you to have “new” members join the group midstream, as the foundational topics build upon each other. If newer members join later and are grafted into the group, they will be at a loss, without the proper basis for the dialogue now presenting itself.

Finally, train additional leaders as facilitators to multiply these groups. This need may be a result of geography, time, need, or a variety of other reasons. But the answer is the

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same: you cannot continue to multiply this ministry alone without mobilizing others. Equipping other facilitators multiplies your influence and enables more pastors and churches to be encouraged and equipped for the work that is needed in replanting and revitalization. As we have noted previously, a facilitator training presentation is also located online for you to download and use, as needed, for you to equip them.

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## FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

### **Do we have to follow the order and content given?**

No, you do not. Of course, there is a “method to our madness,” and we have thought through the process at length. We have also field-tested it over the past four years and in many different settings. As a result, we have found this format to be the best. However, you may think it better to use the curriculum in a different order, and we are fine with that. While we’d encourage you to consider using it “as is,” at least the first time you use it, you in your field of service know what is best and what is needed. So, use it—or ignore parts of it—as you see fit.

### **Can I turn this into webinars or more lecture-driven teaching opportunities?**

Again, you can use it as you see fit. However, this was not the original intent. Our objective was not to major on providing information to the participants, but instead to focus on developing relationships with peers, who will be a constant resource and reminder that pastors are not alone in this endeavor. God is with them, and they have a band of brothers who are in this “army” for God, serving together “for such a time as this.”

### **Can I create other content and/or use them in my own way without copyright concerns or restrictions?**

Yes. It is yours to use as you see fit, for God’s glory and for your (and your colleagues) good.

### **Can we enlarge the group size?**

Yes, if you believe it best.

### **Can we lengthen the required time for the commitment of the group?**

Yes, if you believe it best.

### **Can two associations work together to do this?**

We have done this ourselves in the field-testing work of this tool and have it successful...but not as successful or effective as the groups where all participants are from the same church or association. The “connectedness” of the group seems to make a difference. However, your results and impact may be different, so feel free to attempt this if associational leadership is united in this priority.

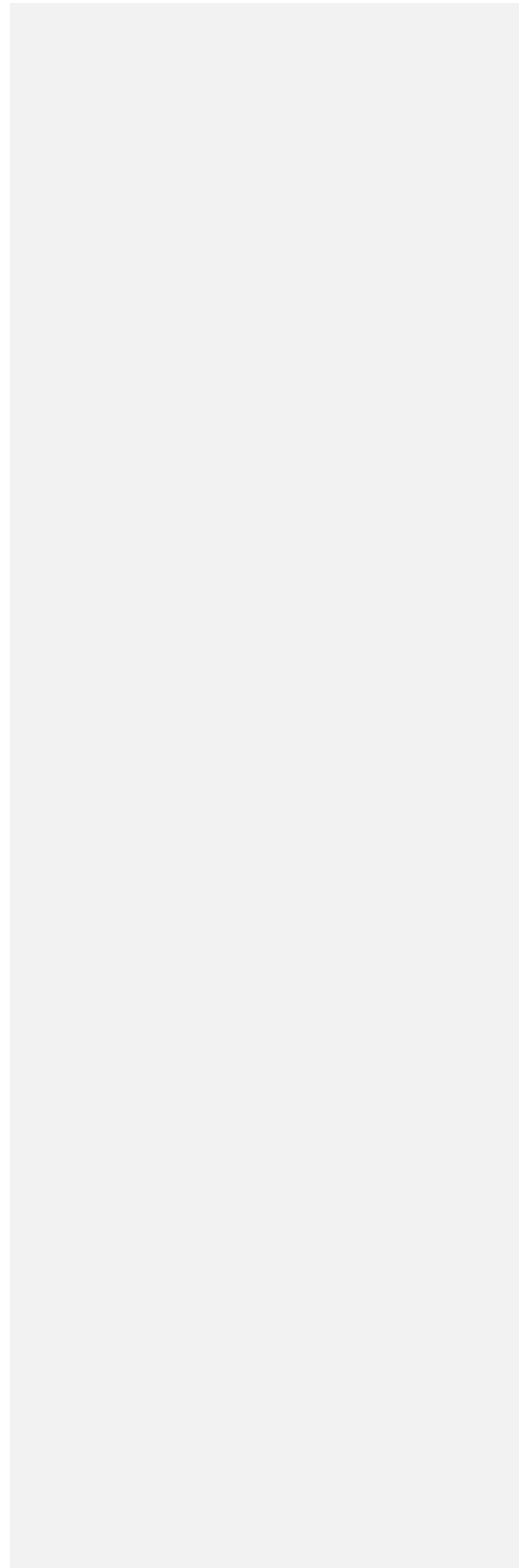
### **Are these resources available in Keynote or other formats?**

Not currently, but there are apps available to enable you to do this. Feel free to try this, as you have the need.

### **Are these resources available in other languages?**

Not currently, though we hope to be able to do this in the future, starting with Spanish.

# APPENDICES



[A]

## WHY TOGETHER IS BETTER

### HIGHLIGHTS

- *The argument of personal autonomy vs. cooperative togetherness*
- *Together is biblical*
- *Together is practical*
- *Together is personal*
- *Together is lasting*
- *Together is more caught than taught*

### INTRODUCTION

In my growing-up years, the musician Paul Simon wrote a song in which he declared, “I am a rock; I am an island. And a rock feels no pain; and an island never cries.” It was a desperate attempt to convince himself that loneliness and isolation were preferred, because it protects us from hurt.

Let’s face it. Many of us would like to forge this journey on our own. We’d rather not have to deal with the complications and inconveniences of waiting on others or wrestling over priorities that differ from the ones we’re currently facing. Our heart tells us this is an unnecessary consideration and an unneeded complexity for what we are dealing with in our ministry. We would be better off doing our own thing, at our own pace, without any hindrances or obstacles to slow us down.

At least that’s what many of us think.

This is especially true with those of us who are more task-driven. We have an objective or goal in mind, and we obsess over getting it done. Other people may keep us from a timely solution or divert our energies and efforts sideways. We want to scurry on with the end in mind.

Those of us who are people-oriented may be perplexed by this. How can someone be so callous and indifferent to others who enjoy relationships, learning, and experiencing things together? It seems counter-intuitive for “people persons” to see ministers as uninterested or at least aloof to the idea of spending more time with other people.

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But while the extrovert is energized by relationships, the introvert is often drained by the same relationships. And relationships are messy, unpredictable, and sometimes complicated. These unnecessary inconveniences can keep pastors from participating or engaging in communal learning opportunities, especially if they are interactive. In our time-obsessed culture, many prefer to opt-out.

But author John Donne was right: no man is an island. As a result, the following reasons suggest we help ourselves to live and function at a higher level when we are participants in what I'd call "together communities."

## IT'S BIBLICAL.

God's Word tells us right at the beginning that it was not good for Adam to be alone (Genesis 2:18). The creation of Eve is a lesson to us all in companionship and the need for another. Other people provide us complementary and supplementary support, encouragement, assistance, and wisdom (among other things) on our journey through life. This is the way God created us—to need community—and to help provide it for others.

Jesus demonstrated this in the calling of the Twelve to be his disciples and to follow Him. The group He impacted in an on-going way was even larger. By the time the early church was being formed, the community had grown to at least one hundred and twenty. After Pentecost, this need for community was in both larger group settings (the temple courts) and in smaller group settings (from house to house), according to Acts 2:46. Both are a part of God's plan for us to experience the togetherness of God's people on mission for Him.

The numerous "one another" passages of the New Testament testify to the need for our togetherness, as well. In the Greek New Testament, these are called "reciprocal pronouns," meaning the interactivity of the relationship goes back-and-forth, not simply one way. This was, and is, a critical element in God's discipleship process for us all.

## IT'S PRACTICAL.

People need each other. We may argue we don't, but in truth, we do. We cannot make the progress needed in life without parents, teachers, colleagues, supervisors, family, and friends, to help us learn and apply what is needed and necessary in life. This is just as true in our walk with Christ as it is in our secular vocation or in raising our children at home. There are no "Lone Ranger" Christians; we need each other, for without others, we are left to our own limitations, assumptions, blind spots, and weaknesses. Even our ideas fall short when we are the only ones giving input!

Synergy provides a multiplication of knowledge, experience, and creativity beyond what we bring to the moment itself. Science has shown us that relationships more than double the impact of a life, because of the unforeseen additional ideas, opportunities, wisdom, and energy others share.

*Our ideas fall short,  
when we are the only  
ones giving input.*

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## IT'S PERSONAL.

Togetherness encourages us, as it reminds us that we are not alone. In many instances it affirms us and assists us with the hidden reality of support, care, and concern. It keeps us from isolation, one of the Devil's primary strategies for discouraging, and ultimately, defeating pastors. Moreover, a community of togetherness validates us as human beings, individuals of worth and importance. It reminds us that we are "seen" and have worth for who we are, not just what we do.

To be honest, it also helps hold us accountable. Because others depend on us, we are motivated to finish our tasks, to grow in our relationships, to follow through on our responsibilities. It reminds us we are in this together, and that others are counting on our presence and our input. Accountability teaches us that our lives matter to others, as well as ourselves.

## IT'S LASTING.

Togetherness creates memorable moments for us to share. These moments often become significant mileposts in our lives. They are "shared" moments, which shout the difference they have made in us, before the witnesses of others, who have often been influenced through the same moments, as well.

But community allows us to do more than just cultivate and harvest personal memories and moments. They also allow us to pour into others. As coaches and mentors, we can share our wisdom with others, investing in them out of our learning and experience. This extends our influence into the future and enables the legacy of our lives to impact others beyond the reach of our own lives.

Moreover, it passes the baton successfully to the next generation. This is hopefully done with a smooth and seamless transition that empowers our successors to be far ahead of where we were ourselves when we dipped our toes into the waters of ministry leadership.

## IT'S MORE CAUGHT THAN TAUGHT.

Finally, we need to be reminded that togetherness and a sense of community are always going to be more caught than taught. In other words, it can't really be learned in a textbook or a manual like this. It must be experienced, hand in hand, side by side. It requires modeling and the power of example, with an invitation for others to join us on the journey. Lessons are learned there, not just in the arrival at a destination, but in the adventure of the journey itself. The joy and value of celebrating these opportunities together is its own reward.

2 Timothy 2:2 *"And what you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses, commit to faithful men who will be able to teach others also."*

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[B]

## THE CONTENT FOR THE GATHERINGS

### CURRICULA SLIDES

#### INITIAL GATHERING: INTRODUCING THE PROCESS (ONLINE)

This session in by nature an overview of the process, and what that will entail for the participants. It is brief and short on details, as the topic suggests, but gives the potential participants a feel for how each session will happen and what the facilitator is like. Expectations are addressed and assumptions are dismissed that could derail participation. If agreement takes place to move forward, then topics for dialogue would begin with these:

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#### SESSIONS 1-6: FOUNDATIONAL ISSUES

These six sessions are absolutely critical to the effectiveness of replanters and revitalizers, no matter what the obstacles and particular issues their unique church is facing. Do not skip these sessions as they lay the foundation for the remainder of the studies and experiences to come.

##### 1. Biblical Basis for Revitalization and Replanting

This session reviews the biblical message of renewal among God's people, from the children of Israel in the wilderness to the dysfunction of early church experiences, like that of Corinth. The presentation makes a case for the importance of constant renewal and how "as the leader goes, so go God's people."

##### 2. Earning Trust, Gaining Credibility

Trust is the heartbeat of change. Since most renewal requires the congregation to change their mind and/or heart, even their will, this session speaks practically to

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building trust and becoming credible to the people the pastor is leading, including long-time members. It also helps you evaluate the level of trust you have earned and when to move forward with key decisions of change.

### 2a. **First 100 Days: for *NEW* revitalizers/replanters**

If your participants are new to the process of replanting or revitalizing, this session focuses them on the key elements that need to have their attention and get accomplished in the first three or so months they are on the field. These items are critical to future success.

### 3. **Exegeting Community AND Church**

This session explores external and internal demographics and helps participants recognize the four quadrants of information-gathering necessary regarding the church's identity, makeup, and reputation.

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### 4. **Defining Reality and Assessing Readiness**

Every leader starts by defining reality. In this session, group members are shown how to do this, and to determine if the congregation is ready to be revitalized or replanted. If not, it will show you where there are challenges that must be overcome first.

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### 5. **Charting a Course for the Future**

This session is all about planning out the needed strategy for the church where participants are serving. Participants will recognize and address the uniqueness of their situation as they prepare for the future, beginning with the end in mind.

### 6. **Shaping the Culture**

This final foundational session emphasizes perhaps the most important element of any renewal process: changing the current church culture to one that eagerly embraces renewal. Since culture inevitably trumps strategy, it is critical that participants know how to shape a new and healthy culture, if they are ever going to implement the strategy God has revealed to them for the church's future.

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## **SESSIONS 7-12: PRIMARY CONCERNS**

These sessions are for those who agree to continue for six more meetings together. The focus here is on the primary concerns that must be addressed in a revitalization/replanting situation, not the systemic, programmatic issues. These dialogues cover integral topics to the well-being of the participants and the churches they serve.

### **7. Family Matters**

One of the biggest issues in pastoral service is family and ministry tensions. This session surfaces this concern and suggests finding appropriate rhythms, more than simply balance, as a solution.

### **8. Falling in Love with Jesus (Again)**

The Great Commandment Jesus gave reminds us that God wants nothing more than our full love and devotion to Him. Since the church at Ephesus struggled with this, the response of our Savior gives the necessary resolution to keep this front and center in the leader's life and the life of the congregation that has drifted or declined.

### **9. Bringing about Change**

Every replanter and revitalizer is an agent of change. Knowing how to do this well is as much art as science, but there are some things every leader should know about implementing change... including why it's so hard or could even cost you your job.

### **10. Dealing with Conflict**

People are messy, broken, and sinful. At their sinful worst, every person is selfish. This often leads to interpersonal conflict. This session deals with the nature of conflict, different kinds of conflicts, and ways to handle conflict in the church and in relationships.

### **11. Communicating Clearly**

Communication is a necessary skill for people who have been hurt in the past. It is important for those who have been part of a toxic or negative culture, filled with suspicion or fear. Most dying churches fit this bill. It becomes important to learn and address the role of communication and how it can affect your church positively (relational unity and agenda harmony) or negatively (gossip and slander).

### **12. Tactical Patience**

One of the key elements of effective replanters/revitalizers is perseverance. But not just perseverance...strategic endurance. Since longevity is critical to the success of replants and revitalizations, this issue is explored and ways are learned to help leaders exhibit the kind of patience needed.

## SESSIONS 13-24: STRATEGIC PLANNING

There is also a planned second set of topics for those who determine it is beneficial to continue the journey together. This section is in twelve separate sessions that can be adjusted and used, as needed or desired. The focus here is on church systems, often seen in programming or processes in the church. While these may form the obvious and evident problems we see when looking at a declining church, they really should be the result of foundational or prescriptive elements the group has already discussed together as a group.

### 13. Your Church System and Results

This session overviews systems theory and how it applies to church life. The presentation addresses the need to clarify objectives and align systems in the church for maximum impact.

### 14. Making Prayer the Centerpiece of Renewal

Prayer is not preparation for the work we do; it is the work. In this session, the role of prayer and subsequent strategies are addressed to keep it integral to the work of renewal within the church.

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### 15. Gospel Preaching for Revitalization

Preaching is always a critical piece of a pastor’s ministry among the congregation, but rarely as much as in a replant or revitalization setting. In this session, the presentation will address the significance of biblical preaching and provide some areas in Scripture that lend themselves effectively to addressing the needs of church renewal.

### 16. Pastoral Care Strategies

Ministering to the personal needs of your church and community are the focus of this session, with a goal of unpacking ways to share the responsibility, cover the entire congregation (not just the “squeaky wheels”), and pastor the community at large.

### 17. Dealing with Past and Present Sin in the Church (Spiritual Warfare)

At the heart of almost every dying church is a spiritual problem. Habitual sins and patterns of disobedience are often found in church life. These are addressed in this session as well as strategies for confession and reconciliation with our Heavenly Father and one another.

## 18. Money Matters

Many churches in decline struggle with finances for a variety of reasons. Addressing these issues and setting up healthy ways of dealing with them are the focus of this session.

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## 19. Facility and Resource Management

Churches needing renewal are often in a state of disrepair and deferred maintenance. In this session, the dialogue centers on how to prioritize and provide for the repairs needed.

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## 20. High Expectations and Assimilation

As guests return to the church and even desire to join the church, the need for a prospective members class should be considered. This session focuses on setting high standards to get high returns and how to see more people stick with your church after they have made the initial visit.

## 21. Discipleship Pathway

This session helps the participants create or evaluate a discipleship pathway (or process) to move people forward in their growth and development from “first touch” to a serving leader. The focus is on the engagement needed with church members to help them grow as they should.

## 22. Missional Engagement

Outreach and community service—really anything outside the church walls—is usually missing in the life of a dead or declining church. This session speaks to the need and then focuses on ways to connect the Gospel to the community of lost people nearby.

## 23. Streamlining Structure

Structure is to enhance, not inhibit, the church’s development and growth. This session speaks to the issues of bylaws and policies, even personnel issues, that need to be addressed for renewal to occur.

## 24. Expanding Leadership

The focus of this session is on discovering and developing new leadership for the church. Since leadership development is a critical issue in the future of the church, strategies are discussed that help identify and equip others for service.

## ADDITIONAL SESSIONS (OPTIONAL)

These sessions are for those who want (a) to continue past the two-year mark as learning colleagues, or (b) to substitute one of these sessions for another mentioned above during year two, because it is more pertinent or germane to the needs of the context of the learning community. They could also be used (c) in a weekly or twice a month schedule, if you are trying to fill a full year long schedule for the group.

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- **Think Multiplication!**

The Great Commission speaks to the importance of multiplication in the church's ministry. Struggling churches are not exempt from this command. This session helps leaders think through necessary steps and obstacles they must address to "think beyond themselves" and adopt a Kingdom mindset.

- **Two Unspoken Realities Pastors Face**

This session deals with two hidden opponents in the work of renewal: predecessors and silence. While the former threatens your leadership, the latter breeds distance and suspicion between a pastor and his congregation.

- **Leveraging the History and Hidden Concerns in the Church**

The history of a church has huge impact on its present and future reality. Past behavior is the best predictor of future behavior. Moreover, history becomes heritage and tradition, entrenching habits that are hard to break. This session addresses this, along with "the skeletons in the closet" of hidden sin.

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- **Simplifying Church**

Complexity is often the enemy of effectiveness, so this session focuses on getting past the chaos and confusion of "church hoarding" and refocuses leaders, and hopefully the church, on the essentials as foundational for everything else.

- **Start Something New!**

The quickest and easiest way to produce growth and inject progress in a declining church is to rally the people behind something new—a vision, leader, ministry, etc. While this is "low hanging fruit" for churches, it is most effective in those just declining off the plateau, and not those congregations that are near death. These issues are addressed.

- **Building Effective Partnerships**

Partnership adds strength, support, accountability, and synergy to any church's turnaround effort. Cooperation has a cost, but it is worth it. This session explores the means and methods of partnering with a healthier church for assistance.

- **Generating and Maintaining Momentum**

Getting the flywheel moving in the right direction is often the hardest part of helping a dying church. This session speaks to the issue of momentum and discusses ways to maximize efforts for alignment and growth together.

- **Engaging the Church in Mission Efforts**

Getting the members of a struggling church involved in mission efforts directs them back to the heart of God, energizes them as they see God at work, and helps them see the difference their lives and the church make for God. This session discusses its impact on the church as it serves God.

## **PLC FACILITATOR TRAINING**

A presentation and session to prep and equip leaders to facilitate learning, sharing, and praying among peers with this curriculum. This unit covers what every facilitator needs to know to pull off the equipping necessary for the participants to bond with each other as they learn more about the ministry they are doing.

[C]

## ENLISTMENT LETTER TEMPLATES

### INITIAL INVITATION

Dear Pastor,

This email is an invitation to join a small, select group of your colleagues in learning and growing together. I will be facilitating a monthly gathering of a group of key church pastors across the area who are seeking to revitalize their church. Your name was shared with me as a select pastor who might be interested in the benefits of this cooperative journey. I hope you will prayerfully consider joining us for this. A maximum of only twelve pastors will be allowed to join this peer learning community.

In each monthly online gathering, we will learn together about a key topic of ministry we are dealing with in our fields of service. We will all share together regarding our experiences in this area, move on to discuss our monthly victories and challenges, and find mutual support, encouragement, and prayer for each other before our session is ended. Each gathering will last no more than an hour and 15 minutes (an hour will be more of the norm).

We are asking for only a six-month commitment at the beginning of our journey together. While there is another six-month leg of the journey to follow, you will be given a chance to re-up or opt-out at the six-month marker. The first six months, we will discuss the following topics together:

- The Biblical Basis for Revitalization and Replanting
- Earning Trust, Gaining Credibility
- Exegeting the Community AND Church
- Defining Reality and Assessing Readiness
- Charting a Course for the Future
- Shaping the Culture

There is an extra, optional session just for NEW revitalizers/replanters entitled Your First 100 Days, as well.

The actual dates and times for our monthly gathering will be determined by those who agree to be a part of the peer learning community together. And though there will

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no assignments to complete for our times together, I'll provide a special thank you to all of you who persevere as a part of this opportunity together.

So, the question is: will you join us in this peer learning community? My hope is that we will experience partnership from each other on our journey, as we learn valuable lessons that will help us tap into our Lord and His wisdom in a new and fresh way. Please email me back no later than Friday to be a participant. If I don't hear from you by then, I will assume you are not able to join us at this time.

I can't wait to see what God is going to show us during our times together!

(Your Name)

## WHITE PAPER ATTACHMENT

### Better Together: Peer Learning Community

#### Meeting monthly, starting in three months

Each meeting will be for up to 1 hour and 15 minutes...with 1/3 of the time for topic training, 1/3 time for Q and A and sharing of highs and lows in church for the month, and 1/3 of time in prayer for each other. The emphasis would not be simply on information, though this is a basis for dialogue, but on praxis, more about application and how this actually works out in the field.

Remember, the objective is not just information: it is to remind you that: (1) you are not alone on this journey, (2) there is much to learn from "the community" (all of the group together), and (3) we can find the encouragement and prayer support we need as we move forward. And then in coming months, we will check in again with each other to see if we're implementing anything we've learned, and making any forward progress.

The group will go for 6 sessions, and we expect all involved to commit to that, then have the group—those who want to continue—re-up for another 6 sessions, if desired. Later, the group can decide on continuing even longer, if participants think it wise. Or some of you may want to start a new PLC (peer learning community) yourself as the facilitator in the future.

We have scheduled our group to meet ONLINE once a month during this process. You will have NO HOMEWORK OR PREP WORK to do, other than to attempt to apply in your field of ministry some of the learning you've received. In addition, it is hoped that you'll begin praying for your colleagues, as well. We will take time off at Christmas and/or summer months.

We will schedule the day and time of the month the PLC will meet at a time of the group's choosing, so at this point, we only need to know if you are interested in joining the learning community. Those who respond affirmatively will be asked to decide on the best time for those who want to participate. That survey will go out after your response.

Please respond to this request soon, or if you need more information, please let us know. My personal info is below. We will follow up with you accordingly. We are

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prayerfully hoping you will be a part, not simply for your benefit, but for the benefit of all involved. We are truly better together!

## FOLLOW-UP

**(first follow up to initial invitation, for those who did not respond with enough information)**

Pastor,

Just a quick reminder of the message below...I'm ASSUMING you are interested in being a part of a peer learning community (aka, cohort) with colleagues during the daytime/workweek, as this was the preferred response from you before...I will include you in the follow up emails to determine a time/day to meet, unless you tell me otherwise...we will have a handful of guys for this learning community, it appears.

Looking forward to having you as a key participant!

(Your Name)

## 2<sup>ND</sup> FOLLOW-UP

Good day, gentlemen!

I am writing each of you as planned participants in our online Peer Learning Community (PLC). While there is still time for invitees to join the PLC (through the weekend), I thought we could start the process of narrowing down our time to meet. We will meet on the same day and time each month, starting later in the month (preferably the ~~same~~ week of ~~every~~ month) and thereafter.

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PLEASE INDICATE THESE OPTIONS IN YOUR ORDER OF PREFERENCE (1 is best, higher number is most difficult)

I prefer to meet (1-3):

- morning
- afternoon
- evening

I prefer to meet on (1-5):

- Monday
- Tuesday
- Wednesday
- Thursday
- Friday

Please respond by Sunday evening, and I'll compile and suggest a couple of options next Monday for us to lock in...

REALLY excited about this opportunity! Should be an amazing, encouraging time for us all. I'm praying already to that end.

For Christ and His Kingdom,

(Your Name)

### 3<sup>RD</sup> FOLLOW-UP

Gentlemen:

Thanks for your responses. Again, I've heard back from all but one, and there is ability on the part of all ~~who have responded~~ on one ~~specific~~ time. As a result, we will meet on MONDAYS at 7:00pm for our monthly meeting. It will be the FOURTH Monday of each month, beginning with March 22. Our topic this month will be "The Biblical Basis for Revitalization and Replanting." If you are planning to join us, please write me back to confirm and send me your mailing address; in return, I will be adding you to my contact list for continued communication.

I will send you a link to an online gathering from Microsoft Teams and a repeat of the invitation by email to make sure you are able to get the link needed. I can't wait to meet each of you; I look forward to our times of learning together.

For Christ and His Kingdom,

(Your Name)

### 4<sup>TH</sup> FOLLOW-UP

Gentlemen,

A Reminder that we will begin our Daytime peer learning community this THURSDAY at Noon. We will begin laying the foundation for our future discussions and our ministry of church renewal with the topic "The Biblical Basis for Revitalization and Replanting." See more info below.

The link for these meetings will remain the same. It is again posted here. See you in a couple of days!

(Your Name)

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## **SESSION FOLLOW-UP #1**

Gentlemen,

Microsoft Teams should notify you of an invitation today for our recurring meetings on the second Tuesdays of the month, starting next week, our next gathering. THERE IS NO PASSWORD needed; simply respond to the invitation when you receive it.

For those of us who were there last night, it was a great first session of learning, encouragement, and prayer. Thanks for your interactive participation! I was blessed to share the time with you.

The PowerPoint from last night's presentation is attached here; use it however you like (re-title, cut and paste, put your name on it, etc.) ...It is for your benefit. The FINAL SLIDE in the presentation has all my contact information; feel free to reach out anytime during the month, if you think I can be of service to you. I am here to assist.

In the meantime, I'm praying for you as you faithfully serve our Father wherever He has placed you in service to Him. Next month when we gather, our topic will be "Earning Trust, Gaining Credibility."

May today be a day He uses you in a special way for His glory!

(Your Name)

## **SESSION FOLLOW-UP #2**

Guys,

It was great to be with you all last night and hear the marvelous stories of God's love and provision. He is leading us all into the future, a fantastic future with Him!

I've attached the PowerPoint from last night here. I'm praying God will help us "ride the wave" with His Spirit, encouraging His people as we disciple them, while keeping eternity in view as we lead!

Looking forward to our session next month on Monday, March 28, as we talk about "Tactical Patience."

If I can serve you in any way, please let me know.

(Your Name)

## ENLISTMENT FOR FACILITATOR TRAINING

Gentlemen,

I hope this email finds each of you doing well. I'm writing again to give you a FINAL chance to join us for the Peer Learning Communities Facilitator Training (dates below). You are the only ones I haven't heard from, so I thought I'd remind you of the specifics...

I am in the process of scheduling "facilitator training" for our Peer Learning Communities of which each of you has **already** been a part. I have been impressed with your participation and involvement. I certainly believe that each of you could facilitate a future peer learning community (or two) of your own, among other pastors where you live and serve.

With that in mind, it has always been my intention to equip participants to handle these PLCs in the future on their own to multiply Kingdom efforts and provide the support and encouragement replanters and revitalizers need.

I am inviting you personally to join in this facilitator training on one of the following dates: Thursday at 10:00am OR Tuesday at 2:00pm. All times are EDT, and the training will only take an hour to an hour and 15 minutes. For those who participate in this, I will be releasing all my PLC files for your future use. I will also of course be available to advise you as questions or concerns arise in the future when you implement the PLC strategy yourself.

Please prayerfully consider this and then email me back with your thoughts and plan to participate in the facilitator training, yes or no, in two weeks. TODAY is the last chance to get in on this.

Thanks, guys!

(Your Name)