

**PATHWAYS TO  
PARTNERSHIP**

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# **PATHWAYS TO PARTNERSHIP**

BOB BICKFORD  
& MARK HALLOCK



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Thanks to my wife Barb for her encouragement and support and for serving along side of me in this adventure we call Replanting. I'm grateful for my kids Alex, Emily and Olivia who sacrificed much as they spent the first years of our Replant

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And I'm thankful for you, the reader of this book as you pray about how God might call you to engage in Replanting Churches for His glory and the good of every community.

### **Bob Bickford**

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Let me begin by saying, I echo everything Bob said. In addition... I want to thank my wonderful wife, Jenna, and my children Zoe and Eli. Thank you for your constant encouragement in my life and ministry.

Thanks to ALL those who contributed to this book in some way. In particular, I want to thank Tamsen Sear, Erica Myeni, and Evan Skelton, who sacrificed many hours to help make this book what it is. I am so grateful.

To all of the pastors and denominational leaders who believe God is not done with declining churches: It is a privilege and joy to serve alongside you in this calling to see dying churches replanted for the fame and glory of Christ.

Finally, thank you to my Calvary Family of Churches' brothers and sisters. I praise God for you. Soli Deo Gloria.

### **Mark Hallock**



# FORWARD

When I became the pastor of Hilltop Baptist Church in Fort Worth, Texas, the church wouldn't have been featured on any list of the fastest-growing churches in America. And frankly, it wouldn't have been there when I left either.

We were in the middle of a tough neighborhood. Our front door had been busted in so many times that we finally started leaving it unlocked and put a sign on it that said, "Open. Come In!" We didn't have anything worth stealing anyway. The only reason I got the job was that no one else's wife was willing to live in the church's run-down parsonage. The church quickly voted me in 7-0. To this day, that was my only unanimous call—ever.

Language and cultural barriers added to the challenge of reaching our neighborhood. Our community had transitioned to become almost completely Hispanic, and yet we didn't have a single person of Hispanic heritage in the church.

Some churches may be small, but you can compare the church makeup with the neighboring community and tell there is great potential. You wouldn't have said that about Hilltop, though. No one expected much of that little church.

But God did.

Hilltop showed me that you can't count any church out—just because a church is small doesn't mean it can't push back darkness in its community.

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I gave the church a choice soon after I arrived. We could either reach out to the surrounding Hispanic community, or we could

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die. They actually decided to vote on the idea. Fortunately, Hilltop chose life that day. The church chose the gospel.

The church prayed mightily. They told their neighbors about Jesus. They gave sacrificially. By the time I left the church, it had grown to more than 50 people. God used those courageous believers at Hilltop to teach me much about ministry, a lot of which still sticks with me today.

Most importantly, I learned every church matters. Every church, no matter how small, can use what it has to impact the world for Christ. Every church can pray. Every church can share Christ. Every church can give to the work of the Lord around the world. With more than 250 million lost people in North America and billions lost around the world, we can't afford to let any church sit on the sideline of the Great Commission. The stakes are too high. The mission is too important.

If we're going to have any meaningful impact on the lostness of our planet, it will be because churches like Hilltop rediscovered their God-given gospel potential. And it will likely be because other churches partnered with them in the process.

I'm excited about how God has breathed new life into countless dying churches like Hilltop in the past few years. At the North American Mission Board, we're hearing stories every week about churches that were given the same choice Hilltop had: engage your immediate community or die. So many of these churches are choosing life. Eternities have been changed because of those choices.

That's why this book you're about to read is so vitally important. Whether you're at a struggling church looking to re-engage your community or you're at a growing church that wants to help, the time to start is now. I pray you'll take the

lessons from this book and put them into practice. Together we can push back darkness throughout North America and around the world.

**Kevin Ezell**

*President of the North American Mission Board, SBC  
Alpharetta, Georgia*

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## INTRODUCTION

I thank my God in all my remembrance of you, always in every prayer of mine for you all making my prayer with joy, because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now.

**- Philippians 1:3-5**

My denominational heritage prizes the autonomy of the local church. This facet of our church life works well in that it allows each congregation to determine how it will live out its mission to proclaim the gospel to the community in which it resides. This freedom of self-determination, under the leadership of the Holy Spirit and the guidance of Scripture, has allowed many local churches to flourish across North America and around the world.

Today we know that not every church is flourishing. In fact, between 900-1,200 churches are either in danger of closing or may close in the next one to three years in the Southern Baptist

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denomination alone. When a local church struggles, its prized historical autonomy can become a hindrance.

Unfortunately, some of the local churches in our tribe can wrongly view their sister churches as competition. Under pressure and fear, rather than reaching out for help, a struggling church may hunker down and redouble its efforts, only to find that the changes they are seeking to make have been initiated too late to pull the church out of its downward trajectory.

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The kind of partnership Paul writes about in the first verses of Philippians is greatly needed among churches today. Programs, events, and renewed passion and energy often can't help struggling churches like other churches can.

We are seeing a new movement take hold, one in which churches reach out to one another; where a strong and healthy church befriends a weaker and struggling church. Together, these congregations are now accomplishing more than they could on their own.

Know this—*partnership isn't easy*. Years of a church going it alone make accepting and adapting to a new partnership a sanctifying work. Because we believe that partnership among churches is not only biblical, but also needed, we've endeavored to write this book. Our prayer is that through this resource, God will raise up pastors and denominational leaders to say yes to working together for God's glory and the good of their communities.

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

May God be glorified; the church strengthened; and men, women, boys and girls hear the life giving message of the gospel of Jesus Christ!

For God's Kingdom and glory,  
**Bob Bickford & Mark Hallock**

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PART 1

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FOUNDATIONS FOR  
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## Chapter 1

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# **PARTNERSHIP IS VITAL TO A REPLANTING MOVEMENT**

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

As exciting as it is to think of even one dying church coming back to life by being replanted and revitalized for the sake of the Gospel, the truth is that in order to reach the masses of people in our world that don't know Christ, *one replant is not enough*. Two are not enough. Ten are not enough. Even a hundred new church replants are not enough! Our vision as the church in

North America must be to see hundreds, and even thousands of churches replanted for the glory of God. What we need is a *replanting movement*. A cyclical movement of churches replanting churches that replant churches.

What exactly do we mean by a replanting *movement*? On the most basic level, movements are about *mobilizing people behind a shared purpose*. Movements happen in our world all the time. Movements happen in the world of business, technology, food, entertainment, or even in the Church. When you look at the spread of the Gospel through the early church in the book of Acts, what you see is a movement...a Gospel movement infused by the Holy Spirit that changed the world, one life, one church and one community at a time.

The time has come for a new kind of movement in the church today. A church replanting movement. A movement where God does what only He can do through His people. A movement where God uses ordinary, faithful pastors, church leaders, and lay people to bring declining and dying churches back to life. A movement that mobilizes God's people behind the shared purpose of replanting dying churches for His glory. A movement where churches with seemingly no hope or pulse come back to life by the Spirit of God in such a way that they not only survive, but *thrive* to the point of replanting other dying congregations. Yes—we need to plant new churches. We need to plant many new churches in order to take the Gospel to areas where people are far from Christ. But at the same time, if we as the Church of Jesus Christ are going to truly push back the darkness and go from a posture of defense to a posture of *offense* in our mission to take the light of Christ into a dark world, we must be as intentional and purposeful in our church *replanting*

efforts as we are in our church planting efforts. It is not an either/or, but rather a both/and. Now is the time for a church replanting movement.

Of course, if we are to see this type of replanting movement become a reality, there are several commitments that must be made on the part of churches, pastors and denominational leaders. For the purposes of this book, there are two commitments that are essential to see this movement become a reality.

**COMMITMENT 1: OUR LEADERS MUST PRACTICE HUMBLE, RADICAL COOPERATION FOR THE SAKE OF GOSPEL ADVANCEMENT.**

Churches are always better together. We are at our best when we humbly and gladly cooperate in ministry together. Just as there is no such thing as a lone ranger Christian, there is no such thing as a lone ranger church (or at least there shouldn't be). We can't do this alone, which is why a replanting movement must be made up of churches, pastors, and denominational leaders who practice humble, radical cooperation. A replanting movement must have Godly leaders at its core who intentionally pursue the joyful sharing of any and all kinds of resources (people, money, programs, etc.) whenever and however we can. In a true replanting movement, this kind of cooperation will not be a burden, but a privilege and delight!

**COMMITMENT 2: CHURCHES MUST BE COMMITTED TO ONE ANOTHER AS INTENTIONAL PARTNERS FOR THE LONG HAUL.**

Ministry is hard in all kinds of ways and for all sorts of reasons. Because of this, not only must we practice humble, radical cooperation for this replanting movement to become a reality, we must be committed to one another as church partners for the long haul. As Christians and as churches, we are the family of God. Just as when healthy nuclear families are committed to each other, our church partnerships need to function in a similar manner. This means through good times and bad times, mountain tops and valleys of church replanting, we are the family of God. We are a family committed to love, encourage and sharpen one another, journeying together in this challenging yet vital ministry as long as God calls us to it. This type of commitment to one another is essential if we are to see a true replanting movement take place.

Can you imagine what would happen if we began to see large numbers of churches begin to pursue this kind of intentional partnership with churches that are struggling just to keep their doors open? More and more churches are choosing to pursue this kind of intentional, kingdom-minded partnership with congregations in need. As a result, many once-dying churches are now becoming healthy again, engaging their communities and reaching the lost with the power of Christ in new ways. This is the power of partnership!

Children's Sunday School classrooms that had been empty for years are now filled with laughter and singing from little ones each and every Sunday morning. Baptism tanks that had been dry and unused for years are now being filled regularly as lost

men and women experience new life in Jesus. Neighborhoods that for years had not even taken notice that a church had been there are now paying attention and being impacted in countless ways through new outreach ministries making a difference in the community. It's happening! The Lord is doing this kind of replanting work all over our country for his glory and the joy of his Church, and we believe *he is just getting started!* Will you and your church be a partner in this replanting movement?

**Partnership brings real hope to a congregation.**

When my wife, Sarah, and I started serving at Derby Hill, a newly replanted congregation, their story was all too familiar. Derby Hill was once prominent in its neighborhood: the voices of kids echoed in the halls; it was focused on both local and global missions; members were being discipled; and it was a

beacon of the Gospel in a community desperately in need of Jesus. Eventually, Derby Hill became an inward-focused, aging congregation, and its once powerful ministry to the community declined with the congregation. They needed a fresh start. They were in need of being replanted.

As members of Derby Hill's sending church, our family was able to serve at Derby Hill during the initial replanting phase. We were blessed to be part of something that was a remarkable reflection and demonstration of the Gospel. A dying church was coming back life! One legacy member remarked, as kids voices echoed in the halls once again, "Boy, it has been too long since we have had any kids here." The focus radically shifted from maintaining the status quo to reaching the community with the power of the Gospel. I have served in several ministries throughout my lifetime, and I have not had a greater privilege than partnering with Derby Hill.

**-Jaemiah Heiser, Member of a Partner Church**



## Chapter 2

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# WHY SHOULD WE PURSUE A REPLANTING PARTNERSHIP?

Why is partnership so important to the health of the Body of Christ? More specifically, why is partnership so important when it comes to helping a replant church experience new health, hope, and vitality? Maybe this story can help paint a picture for why partnership is so critical...

During the summer of 1904 an unlikely partnership was formed at the World's Fair in St. Louis. The summer was unusually hot and people were searching the fair for something to help cool them off. A vendor named Arnold had just what they were looking for... ice cream. People lined up for what seemed like miles to get some of his cool and satisfying ice cream but there was one problem. Arnold was not prepared for the demand and ran out of paper bowls. Next to Arnold's ice cream booth was a man named Ernest, a pastry chef, who was making a Persian wafer desert. Ernest also had a problem, his pastry was not selling. He noticed the problem Arnold was having and took some warm pastry and rolled it into a cone shape. He then went over and showed Arnold how the cone could hold a scoop of the ice

cream. On that hot day during the World's Fair in St Louis the wafer ice cream cone was born because a partnership was formed.<sup>1</sup>

This is a beautiful picture of true partnership—people working together in order to produce something far greater than that which they could produce by themselves. Arnold and Ernest had no idea that they would change the way people around the world would forever eat and enjoy ice cream. All because of partnership.

Whenever I think of Arnold and Ernest, I can't help but think to myself, "If partnership could have that kind of world impact for the sake of ice cream, what kind of world impact could churches have partnering together in the power of Christ for the sake of the Gospel?" Just imagine the kind of Gospel-advancing, life-changing, community-transforming impact we could see in our world if churches got serious about coming alongside and partnering with one another. Working together to see God bring dying congregations back to life for His glory through replanting. This is the power of partnership. This is what the Lord calls each of us as individuals and congregations to be part of. Let's consider four key reasons why partnership in replanting is not only needed, but is in fact not optional for those of us who belong to Jesus.

#### **REASON 1: PARTNERSHIP IS BIBLICAL.**

Simply put, churches must partner with one another because God has said so in his Word. Partnership is ultimately God's idea! We see this all throughout Scripture. As one writer puts it,

Partnership is an often overlooked, yet vitally important aspect of New Testament Christianity. Although the ministry of Paul and other prominent New Testament leaders was in some ways unique and, therefore, in some ways unrepeatable, the *pattern* of partnership is repeatable. God still provides suitably gifted people to facilitate such partnerships today. Paul used the word "partnership" to describe both church leaders and churches working together:

- As for Titus, he is my partner and fellow worker for your benefit. (2 Cor. 8:23)
- I thank my God in all my remembrance of you...because of your partnership in the gospel. (Phil. 1:3-5)<sup>2</sup>

It is true that throughout history, and specifically in the pages of Scripture, we see that partnership happened between individuals and churches, as well as churches and other churches.

"They helped each other out in terms of *doctrine and practice* (Acts 8:14-25; Gal. 3), they *relocated leaders* to strengthen other situations (Acts 11:19-23, 25-26, 12:25, 16:1-3), they sent *individuals and teams* on short-term strengthening visits (Acts 11:27, 19:21-22; 1 Cor. 4:15-17; Phil. 2:19-29; 2 Tim. 1:18), they sent *money* to help each other and bless the wider society (Acts 11:28-30), and they helped advance the gospel together and *plant churches* (Rom. 15:24; 2 Cor. 10:15-16)."<sup>3</sup>

It ought to be our great desire and joy to follow the lead of Scripture and seek partnership with other congregations in these same ways today.

## **REASON 2: PARTNERSHIP BRINGS NEEDED ENCOURAGEMENT AND HOPE TO A REPLANT.**

When a healthy church partners with a new replant, God brings encouragement to his people. Typically, when you step inside a

new replant, you will encounter folks who have been serving for years and are *tired*. Many have probably lost passion and zeal, which is why they have decided to pursue becoming a replant in the first place. It's not that they desire to be dispassionate about the Lord, the church, or the lost. It's just that they've been going so hard for so long that they're simply worn out. It's been a difficult season for that church, and likely the season has been a long one. This replant needs encouragement—lots of loving encouragement that comes uniquely through partnership with other congregations.

God's people in replants also need hope. Many times these churches have lost hope. As a result, they have lost their passion for what the Lord can do in and through their congregation. They need to be loved and encouraged by partner churches in such a way that they begin to believe the truth that God is about to do something great in and through them! They need a new hope. They need the hope to believe that God is just getting started with them. Partnership with other churches can help bring this kind of needed hope to a replant.

### **REASON 3: PARTNERSHIP FIGHTS TERRITORIALISM BETWEEN CHURCHES.**

There's no place for territorialism in the Kingdom of God. I hope you believe this. Sadly, territorialism is all too common. Some pastors and congregations get territorial about their church, feeling threatened by other congregations in their community. What we need are more and more churches that don't get territorial. Churches that purposefully fight

territorialism through intentional partnership with other churches, specifically those that are struggling and declining.

The truth is, as churches, we are always better together! Radical cooperation between churches is needed now more than ever. In fact, this type of church-to-church cooperation is a core, convictional value shared by many in the Gen-X and Millennial generations who are now members and leaders of congregations throughout our communities. The value of building *The Kingdom* rather than *my kingdom* (or my church's kingdom) is a huge value in younger generations and in many of the fastest growing, most healthy church planting networks. Much has been written about church plants being far healthier when they work tightly with other churches. The same is true of church replants—they need other churches to help them become what they cannot become on their own. Jesus calls us to work together to make him famous, and it should be a joy to do so! No lone rangers here. As both individuals and churches, we need one another. The mission field is too hard to go at it alone.

**REASON 4: PARTNERSHIP RESTORES A GOSPEL WITNESS TO A COMMUNITY IN NEED OF JESUS.**

All too often declining churches have become non-factors in their communities. Where perhaps at one time this church was a central hub serving various needs in the community, they have sadly become nothing more than an eyesore to those in the neighborhood. I have visited with non-believers in different cities who would just as soon see dying churches in their neighborhoods disappear and become restaurants or apartment complexes than for them to remain as they are—non-factors in

the neighborhood. *This must never be.* The thought of this should break our hearts! How desperately neighborhoods all across our country need these declining churches to be replanted and become lighthouses for Jesus once again. Replanted churches serve as a source of true hope and encouragement, love and healing for people in their communities. The lost and broken in these communities need the church simply because they need Jesus. Church partnership can help restore a Gospel witness to a community.

The bottom line is that we as churches are better together! Millions in our communities need to be reached with the Gospel. Thousands of dying churches need encouragement and assistance from other congregations that partnership provides. This is a good and beautiful thing. Partnership is a God-honoring thing. The question is: Will you and I pursue it?

### **Partnership helps churches experience the Gospel.**

Partnering with a new church replant is such a tangible, experiential way to be reminded of gospel truth. Two ways come to mind as I consider my own experience in partnering with replanted churches: dependency and simplicity.

First, established churches have an all-too-easy tendency to become self-sufficient and self-centered. At my own church, ministries are plentiful. Leaders are abundant. In many ways (although never in every way), the organization hums along. But the danger of comfortability is ever present, and self-sufficiency and self-centeredness are precisely the opposite of the gospel. Visiting a replant is often a much-needed reminder of how my own church used to be: small, dependent, fragile...these are words that describe me! The gospel is brought before my eyes again as I remember the goodness of God in saving people who have nothing to offer. It brings much joy to both the established church and the replanted church to partner in radically God-dependent mission.

Second, replants remind me of the simplicity of the gospel in a culture that often overcomplicates ministry. There is such

beauty in the simple singing and preaching of the Word as Christians fellowship together. Established churches like my own, often ministering in a thousand different ways – many of them good, by God's grace – can still benefit greatly from the simple worship of a replanted church. A replant, to be Biblically successful, must keep the “main thing” the main thing, no frills! I intentionally use the term “Biblically successful” because big programs, lots of people, and inch-deep growth aren't the kind of success that a replant (or an established church) should be interested in. They are interested in Biblical success: salvation of the lost and deep discipleship built on the foundation of a simple proclamation of God's truth. And I cherish that reminder in the culture of our day that often majors on the minors.

**- Ben Haley, Pastor of a Partner Church**



## Chapter 3

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### **BEFORE WE PARTNER:**

#### *Considerations for a Partnering Church*

Perhaps you are sold on this idea of church partnership and specifically partnering with a replant. You understand the sad reality that many congregations in our country are sick and dying and they need radical help. That declining and dying churches need partnership with healthy churches that can come alongside them and help them be replanted as new congregations. What role can your church play in partnering with these churches? What would it look like for your congregation to partner with a replant in need of new life and growth?

At this point you might be asking yourself questions like, “Can our church do this? What if we don’t have a ton of money or people? Isn’t this kind of church to church partnership only something large churches can pull off?” Your church, regardless of its size and available resources, *can* and *should* partner with a replant. And what a joy it is!

A place to start for a partnering church is simply to do some evaluation of its own readiness to partner. Every church is unique and brings unique gifts, resources, and passions to the table of partnership. This is a wonderful thing! What about your church? Can you identify some of the specific ways the Lord may want to use your congregation in a partnership? To help determine this, there are four specific questions every potential partner church should honestly ask and wrestle with as they consider moving forward.

**QUESTION 1: DOES OUR CHURCH HAVE THE MARGIN AND MOTIVATION TO PARTNER WITH A REPLANT?**

It is one thing to have the desire to partner with a replant, it is another for a church to have the appropriate margin and motivation to actually follow through with it. It is important for the leaders of a potential partner church to count the cost of partnership. What kind of margin does their church currently have? In other words, is their church so busy with programs and other initiatives that it really doesn't have the space to pursue partnership with a replant at this point in time? Is partnership something they should look into more seriously down the road once they have greater margin to get involved in a healthy way? Or perhaps the leaders believe this kind of partnership must become a priority for their church, which means they must look seriously at how to make it happen. We have seen churches that mean well when it comes to partnership with a replant and they want to be involved, but their congregation simply doesn't have the time and space to do it well.

A second consideration for a potential partner church is level of motivation. This means evaluating if the partner church has a burden to help dying churches in need of replanting. Is there a passion for this? Is the congregation motivated to get their hands dirty in partnership? It could be that a church is so consumed with itself that it does not get excited to come alongside and help another congregation. However, it may be that a church would love to partner with and help another, but they are simply in need of more information and leadership that can help mobilize them to act. This is where the leadership of a partner church is so critical. These leaders must cast a compelling vision for partnership and help to create a sense of excitement and anticipation for what God can and will do through intentional relationship with a replant. Most churches are able to create the margin and find the motivation they need for partnership if they are led well.

**QUESTION 2: WHAT DO WE HAVE THAT CAN BLESS A REPLANT THROUGH PARTNERSHIP?**

There are many churches and leaders that have a desire to get involved in helping with replanted congregations, which is so encouraging. But often they are unsure as to how they can best get involved. This is what is so exciting about partnership! There are so many ways to get involved. Every church has unique resources they can use to bless a replant through partnership, and churches have unique personalities and passions which allows for unique ways to help. The Lord wants to use the uniqueness of each congregation to help build effective Kingdom partnerships. To help a church get started

thinking about specific ways God may lead them to partner, consider the following four sub-questions:

*Do we have volunteers to share?*

There is no greater way to get involved with partnership than to help get individuals and families volunteering in a hands-on manner. Many healthy and growing churches have an overflow of members and attenders who can volunteer time and energy if they are given a compelling vision and purpose for doing so. Sadly, many potential volunteers are underutilized and are, quite frankly, bored. They need a new challenge. They need to be stretched. They need a new ministry opportunity where God can use them for the sake of the Kingdom. Partnering with a replant can help provide this very opportunity. What would it look like for a partner church to send a handful of volunteers on a regular basis to help serve the pastor and congregation of this new replant? Can you imagine the joy it would bring for both the volunteers and to the replant? It is vitally important for partner churches to consider if they have volunteers to share.

*Do we have money and other resources to give?*

Churches should take some time to honestly assess what they can bring to a partnership in regards to resources, financially and otherwise. For some churches giving financially is a primary way to partner with a new replant, while for others it may be that they are unable to give much financially but can bless a replant through other resources. Again, partner churches should consider the unique resources they can bring to the table that

will help a replant. Perhaps there are leadership, musical, children's ministry, or outreach and missions resources. Each of these can serve as a huge blessing to a congregation in need.

*Do we have encouragement to speak?*

One of the things leaders in a replant continually need is love and encouragement. As mentioned earlier, replanting is a difficult ministry. There are unique stresses and challenges involved, and because of this, a partner church can be a great blessing to a replant by simply being intentional about caring for and building up this congregation. Later in the book we will look at some specific ways this can happen, but at this point it is worth considering how powerful it is when a partner church commits to encouraging a replant in this way.

*Do we have prayers we can pray?*

One sure way each and every church can partner with a replant is through purposeful prayer. Even if a congregation has very little in regard to finances or other types of resources, they have the most important and powerful resource available to them through prayer. In fact, while there are many ways to partner with a replant, there is no greater way a church can come alongside and encourage a replant and its leaders than through seeking the Lord in prayer on their behalf. Every partner church has prayers they can pray. These prayers are deeply needed, and are prayers that God is going to use in the life of this church!

**QUESTION 3: THEOLOGICALLY SPEAKING, WHAT TYPE OF REPLANT ARE WE OPEN TO PARTNERING WITH?**

This is an important question to consider, not only for the partner church but also for the replant. As we will discuss later, there are different levels and types of partnership your congregation can pursue with a replant. Theological alignment (or a lack thereof) should be a factor in helping you to determine what type of partnership you will pursue. While there are indeed ways churches can effectively partner with replants they are less theologically aligned with, the reality is that where there is shared theological conviction, there will often be deeper and more intimate relationship between the congregations.

Why is this the case? Why is determining theological alignment so important in creating a strong partnership with a replant? Because ultimately, if the goal of this partnership is to help a new replant become a healthy, thriving, God-glorifying congregation in its community, then what is believed about the Bible, Gospel and salvation matters. In fact, it is critical. What is believed about core Christian doctrines will shape how this replant is led and how it functions. If a partner church is not aligned with the replant on these matters, it will determine the amount of money, time, and energy they can invest in this partnership. These theological convictions are not periphery, they are *central*. What a church believes will shape both why and how they do replanting ministry. As a potential partner church, you must discern theological alignment to make sure you can get on board with exactly why, and how, this replant desires to move into the future. Likewise, a replant must also discern theological alignment before they agree to link arms with a partner church like yours.

From experience, we can tell you—it is far better to address these theological issues on the front end of partnership. If these conversations are ignored or avoided, things can get very messy when a doctrinal issue arises unexpectedly, especially if you are pretty far down the road together. Clear and up-front communication in all areas, including theology, is key to effective long-haul partnership.

#### **QUESTION 4: WHO FROM OUR CHURCH WILL LEAD US IN THIS POTENTIAL PARTNERSHIP?**

Strong, committed leadership is critical to any healthy church partnership. For this reason, we recommend putting together a ***Replant Partner Team*** that can help mobilize and lead your congregation in the partnership process. While a pastor should be part of this team, it is important that other individuals from the congregation are actively involved as well. This team should be made up of a diverse group of men and women (and youth) who are all marked by these seven characteristics (add others as you see fit unique to your church culture):

1. A passion for Jesus and the Word.
2. A love for your church.
3. A deep care and compassion for others.
4. A humble heart that desires to serve.
5. A desire to help a replant.
6. A faithful commitment to the partner process.
7. A team player who is easy to work with.

Our encouragement is that the replant partner team tries to meet together every 4-6 weeks over the course of a year, for about 1-2 hours in length. This regularly scheduled time

together will allow the team to strategize and determine ways to consistently mobilize the congregation to be involved in the partnership. *It is not the job of this team to carry the entire load of the partnership, but rather to help cast vision and plug in the members of the congregation to use their gifts and get involved in the partnership in some way.*

### 10 signs your church is (or is not) ready to partner with a replant

In the world of Church Replanting finding and developing partnerships between stronger and weaker or struggling churches is absolutely critical to see a decline in the closure rate of the local congregations that dot the North American landscape. Fortunately, there is an increasing and growing interest in Replanting and stronger churches are looking for opportunities to connect, serve and resource congregations in need. Here are some ways you can know if your church is ready to explore partnering with a Replant.

**Ready #1:** *Your church has discerned a call from God.*

We often tell potential Replanters; “If you are simply testing the waters and looking for a ministry position,



please don't consider replanting." We're serious. Replanting is, in our opinion one of the most difficult ministry assignments anyone could ever take on. Decades of decline are often due to spiritual demise, leadership and organizational dysfunction, disconnection from the community and usually coming with all of those are aging, dilapidated and outdated facilities. In Replanting you're not just starting at zero, you're probably starting at -10. Your church must be called to engage with a Replant. We, in our own strength and wisdom don't seek out the difficult ministry opportunities--but God calls some to work in the very difficult places.

**Ready #2:** *Your church understands the pace.*

A church needing to be replanted presents you with multiple needs all at once and each of them could be at threat level red. Forward progress in any one area needing attention and effort can be hampered by needing to move slow, overcoming reservations or fear and providing abundant reassurance to those who are part of the legacy group. Plans and proposals often have to be evaluated and edited in response to "unforeseen circumstances" that threaten to derail or at least delay momentum. Replanting is never 1, 2, 3 it is typically 1, -3, 4, -2, 1.

**Ready #3:** *Your church is ready to embrace the messiness.*

Replanting a church with existing Legacy members, who are important and matter to God, is a highly relational endeavor. It may be easier to simply think you can dismiss the remaining members but it is not honoring to God to overlook them or see them as obstacles hindering your ministry—they must be seen as your ministry. One of my favorite verses is Proverbs 14:4 says this: “*Where there are no oxen, the manger is clean, but abundant crops come by the strength of the ox.*” A mentor of mine summarized this verse through this phrase: “*No mess; no ministry.*” If your church wants a partnership with no hassles and no messes then keep walking right past Replanting. But understand this, ministry is always messy.

**Ready #4:** *Your church embraces a biblical definition of success.*

Most replants don't explode in attendance, baptisms and budget monies given to missions or ministry. Replants typically take 5-7 years to grow into sustainable local congregations. They may never break the 200 barrier. If your church is willing to embrace success in partnering with a Replant as seeing people come to know Jesus, and the community be made noticeably better, your church is probably ready to partner with a Replant.

**Ready #5: Your church adopts a servant-not-savior mindset**

The church needing to be replanted has likely made decisions that have contributed to where it finds itself today. They know that, you know that. But, there was likely a time when that Church was healthy and vital somewhere in its history. They need help and hope that comes from a servant, willing to walk alongside of them, helping them to become who God has called them to be once again. As a partner church you're not there to be their "savior" you're there to serve them for the sake of the Gospel.

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In the same way that Good partnerships are critical to the work of replanting, partnerships that go off the rails create a bad experience for everyone hinder the work of replanting. How do you know if your church is NOT ready to become a partner with a church seeking to Replant? Here are some signs:

**Not-Ready #1: *Your church expects the replant to be mini-version of your congregation.***

The local church you lead and serve with is likely a great expression of God's work in a local body of believers. That doesn't mean a church just like yours is needed in another location. The church needing to be

replanted likely differs in context--the people right around the church geographically may differ which means that your style of church may not translate as well in that location. Partnering well means allowing the Replant partner to develop the best expression of itself in that location rather than lesser imitation of the stronger church in its location.

**Not-Ready #2:** *Your church views the replant as a failure before you engaged.*

The church needing to replant isn't a failure. Failure would be doing nothing and not asking for help. But, it's not uncommon for the stronger church to possess an attitude that expresses superiority in some way. Those who asked for partnership and help can spot attitudes like this quickly. It is important to view the church needing to be replanted as a sister congregation who is in need of help and support and good leadership.

**Not-Ready #3:** *Your church evaluates the Replant by your scoreboard.*

There is a lot of talk, discussion and even debate about what success is for a church. Measuring success by externals is very easy. Attendance, budgets, ministries, facilities do tell a story but only part of the story. Success for a Replant often looks much different than success for a church or church plant in another

context. Defining success as faithfulness to the scriptures, the mission of gospel proclamation, visiting the sick and widows, making disciples, seeing conversions and baptisms, and watching the community become noticeably better are all part of the marks of success for any church including a replant. A Replant will grow at its own pace and have its own expressions of ministries all of which will be unique to who God is making it to be.

**Not-Ready #4:** *Your church has its hand hovering over the “exit” button.*

Replanting is a marathon. On average it can take between 5-7 years for a Replant to fully transition and even then the congregation may not be fully self-sustainable in that the Replanting pastor may work bi-vocational for years or even for the foreseeable future. If a partnering church is looking for a quick in and out then partnering with a Replant will not be a good fit.

**Not-Ready #5:** *Your church is simply looking for a facility.*

Existing church properties are some of the most significant kingdom resources that exists in North America. Simply put, it is very difficult to replace them in today's dollars, and we never want to see them sold and lost to ministry. Church plants and growing

churches are in great need of facilities and property. This need can be met through partnerships and replanting. The need for facility and meeting space can at times lead to perceived pressure on the part of the struggling church and the potential partner church. Strong churches simply looking for space and facilities may overlook the value and significance of the local body of believers who are part of the historic congregation. A church is always more than a building—valuing the legacy members glorifies God and is a good testimony among other churches in the area.

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Replanting would not be possible without partnerships between churches. Good partnerships between stronger and weaker congregations will help to accelerate the Replanting movement for the glory of God and the good of the community.

## Chapter 4

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### **BEFORE WE PARTNER:**

#### *Considerations for a Replant*

A few years ago, I was meeting with a new church planter for coffee. After he shared with me the exciting vision of this new congregation and its desire to make sold-out disciples of Jesus in a largely unchurched neighborhood of Denver, I looked at him and said, “I’m in! How can I help? What are some ways our church can partner with you and this church plant?” At that moment, there was an awkward silence. He then looked at me with sort of a confused look on his face. “Uh, if I’m honest, I really haven’t thought much about that. Prayer and money is always nice.”

Oh boy. “Prayer and money is always nice?” Well, that is a true statement. I’ve got to give him that. But...really? I’m sitting here as a potential partner with your new church plant and that’s all you’ve got? To tell you the truth, I felt embarrassed for this young church planter. This sweet guy had a great vision for his church, but he had not thought through some of the most basic

components for building effective partnerships with other churches that would be absolutely critical for the long-term health and growth of this new congregation. While I tried to lovingly offer a few words of counsel and coaching to him on how to build partners, we did not move forward in formal partnership with this church plant at that point in time.

I share this story to illustrate the importance of having an intentional strategy for church partnership. Unlike my church planting friend, the leaders of a new replant must have a thoughtful game plan for getting other congregations on board and connected to the ministry of their church. Before partnership can begin to develop, it is critical for leaders in a replant to thoughtfully and prayerfully ask and answer two key questions.

**QUESTION 1: WHAT ARE SOME OF OUR PRIMARY PARTNERSHIP NEEDS?**

The first question a replant should ask pertains to the various needs they have. While there are probably all kinds of needs present in this congregation, they typically fall together in groups. The leaders of the replant should take some time together and list some of the present needs under the following categories.

*Need 1: Relationships*

These relate specifically to the ongoing care and encouragement that can come from a partner church. How can a partner church help to encourage the replanter, the replanter's family, and the



leaders and members of this new replant? What would some of these relational needs be?

*Need 2: Finances*

Typically, new replants need financial help and assistance of some kind. A replant should be clear on what exactly these needs are, and which needs a partner church might be able to help with.

*Need 3: Leadership*

Replants are often short on strong leaders. What are currently some of the specific leadership needs in the replant? Music? Children and youth? Other?

*Need 4: Volunteers*

Every replant needs volunteers. However, the leaders of a replant should think through carefully where they currently need volunteers the most. How might volunteers from a partner church be best utilized? A game plan is needed for this, as volunteers from partner churches will become frustrated without a clear vision and plan.

*Need 5: Equipment and Supplies*

What are some of the main equipment and supply needs in the replant? For example, is a new sound system needed? New signage? A new coffee bar? What about fresh paint in the

classrooms? Are new children's toys needed in the nursery? Perhaps new Sunday School curriculum? What about copies for the church bulletin and other teaching resources?

*Need 6: Prayer*

Putting together a list of specific prayer requests can be extremely helpful in mobilizing church partners to pray for the replant. Update these prayer requests regularly and make them easily available for partner churches to use on an ongoing basis.

**QUESTION 2: HOW WILL WE NURTURE OUR RELATIONSHIP WITH A PARTNER CHURCH?**

Like any relationship, partnership takes intentionality. To build a close friendship between churches takes work and time. What are some of the particular ways a replant can nurture its relationship with a partner church? Here are five very practical relationship building strategies for a replant to implement.

*Strategy 1: Communicate Consistently*

The leaders of a replant should work hard to over-communicate with church partners. Communication should be clear and consistent. There is nothing worse than for a partner church to be out of the loop with what is happening with a replant they are trying to help. On the other hand, there are few things that stoke the passion for the partner relationship than keeping partner churches in the loop with what all is happening in the replant.

### *Strategy 2: Celebrate Victories*

Invite partner churches to celebrate victories in the replant! For example, when there is a baptism or baby dedication, that is a victory to be celebrated. A replant should invite partner churches to celebrate these with them. A replant should work to share the wonderful ways God is working to change lives through this new work with partners.

### *Strategy 3: Share Struggles*

While celebrating victories with partner churches is appropriate, so is sharing struggles. Replanting is hard—it just is. A good partner church understands this, which is why they will want to be aware of the specific challenges the replant is experiencing. Churches are called to share in one another's sufferings that we might pray for and serve one another. Being open and transparent with some of these struggles is critical if this is to happen.

### *Strategy 4: Practice Thankfulness*

Have you ever given a gift to someone who did not offer thanks of any kind back to you? My guess is you have. Of course, we don't give gifts in order to be thanked, but a thank you sure is appreciated. In fact, doesn't it make you even more eager to give to this person again in the future? The same is true in partnership. A replant should seek to practice consistent, purposeful gratitude and thankfulness with its partner churches. Expressing sincere thankfulness will bring encouragement to

the partner church and will help strengthen the relationship between the two churches even more.

*Strategy 5: Pray for the Partner Church*

They are few things that nurture any type of relationship more than prayer. Whether it is a relationship with a spouse, a child, or a friend, God uses prayer to grow deeper intimacy and connection. In the same way, prayer is vital to nurturing a replant's relationship with a partner church. As a result, a replant should be very purposeful in prayer. Ask the partner church to share specific prayer requests for their church and those in the congregation. The replant should commit to praying for these things and regularly let the partner church know they are being prayed for. Watch how God uses prayer to grow this important relationship for his purposes.

**how can a replant find church  
partnerships?**

Having pastored established churches since 2001, I made some unfortunate assumptions as God moved us into this season of leading a replant. Because I had

experienced a certain rate of growth in each of the previous churches I served, it made perfect sense to me that the same would happen in a replant.

Leading a replant, however, is very different from pastoring an established church. Leading a replant church requires church partnerships. A replant church is resource hungry, people are needed, financial resources are needed, and you can't do it alone. I am continuing to learn how to find, maintain, and cultivate new partnerships.

Here are a few ways we have thus far entered some strong, partnering relationships.

### **ministry friends**

You likely have friends in ministry —pastors, youth pastors, missions committee members, deacons, or simply friends who are members of other churches. Contact them, reconnect — share your call to replanting. Create a prospectus that provides a clear and captivating picture of the way things look now (the negative present) contrasted by how they will look moving forward (the positive future). Ask these friends to become prayer partners and encourage them to share your replant opportunity with their friends, Sunday school classes, and church staff. Your relationship with members of other churches becomes a vital resource in the first phase of seeking out church partners.

### **missions conferences**

Our replant is taking place in a different state from where we previously lived. The state we left in order to replant became a huge source of church partnerships —more than I could have imagined! Through sharing our vision with all our ministry friends, opportunities opened up beyond our personal reach. I was invited to that state's missions conference to share about our replant. This allowed us to connect with many more churches looking to partner with church plants. I would encourage you to look for any opportunity to be part of a missions conference (whether at the national, state, associational, or local church level) where you can share your captivating vision and connect with other mission-minded church leaders.

### **local association/director of missions**

In a matter of weeks, there will be a Replanting Certification Seminar at the NAMB headquarters in Alpharetta. There are more than 250 directors of missions signed up to take part in this very first-of-its-kind seminar. It excites me, because our replant situation would not have happened without the leadership of our association and director of missions. That so many DOM's are beginning to get excited about the potential for replanting is huge! And it's huge in terms of finding church partnerships. If the leadership of your association supports the work of

replanting, there is already associational buy-in. That means you already have a network of churches familiar with your replanting. Even if you are new to the area (as I was), your replant situation is a known need. For us, this meant opportunities to speak to area churches about our need and our story. This opportunity opened doors to other associations (even in other states) that have invited us to share with their associational church leaders about our replant. Great DOMs and associational leaders are a huge resource for church partnerships!

### **churches looking for partners**

This point is more of a sub-point of all the above, but very pertinent. While not all churches are looking for “hands-on” opportunities to partner in church planting or replanting, many are looking for such opportunities. Many are not yet aware of “replanting.” In many ways, the struggles of a replant are much more relatable to established churches than are those of the “from scratch” church plant. The demographics of attendees (at least at the beginning) are much the same. The need for new vision and re-energized evangelism efforts are shared. In a replant, the new focus, direction, and vision will resonate well with established churches. We have been connected to partners by our state convention and association (and ministry friends) who had been contacted by churches seeking to partner with planters and replanters. There are ready-made partnerships out there!

### some practical encouragement

1. **Be clear and direct.** Don't beat around the bush, but share your specific needs to potential partners with clarity. Many larger churches are ready to send teams to do "their thing," even though it might not be what you need (or even fit your vision).
2. **Be flexible.** Sometimes church partners cannot meet your need with specificity, but still want to help. We have found there are times we require partners to fit the vision and other times we adapted to fit our partner's gifting and ability—to the glory of God and expansion of our own vision.
3. **Be responsive.** Communicate often and clearly. When they email or leave a message, get back to them. Don't leave people hanging. While I have failed at this more than I'd like to admit, we also have entered partnership with several churches that had tried to partner with other local planters but never received prompt returned communication.
4. **Be prepared.** We launched strong because we had many partners on the front end, helping in numerous ways. But you will need partners as much (if not more) in Year 2 (and I hear even in Year 3). In a replant, be ready to see decline before you enter a true season of growth. All who are present at the launch—whether it's the previous church's remnant (and tithers) or curious community folks—most likely not be there in Year 2. Plan to forge some lasting church partners who will be ready to strengthen their support as the replant takes root.

Jason Helmbacher

Replant Pastor, Church at Affton

St. Louis, MO



**PART ONE**  
**DISCUSSION QUESTIONS**

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*Foundations for Partnership*

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1. We are living in a day when church revitalization and replanting is needed more than ever before. Discuss some of the reasons why partnership is vital to a replanting movement in North America and around the world.
2. Why should a partner church seriously consider pursuing a replanting partnership? What are some of the blessings and benefits that come from an intentional partnership for a replant? For a partner church?
3. What are some of the real challenges churches (both a replant and a partner congregation) must consider before pursuing a partnership?
4. Discuss some of the key considerations for a partnering church that are laid out in chapter 3. Why are these considerations so important before jumping into a partnership?
5. Discuss some of the key considerations for a Replant that are laid out in chapter 4. Why are these considerations so important before jumping into a partnership?

6. What are some of the things that excite you most about the potential for partnership? Why?

This concludes your complimentary copy of Part 1 of Pathways to Partnership  
For Parts 2-4 of this resource please purchase this book via the amazon.com or visit your favorite bookseller.

### Recommended Reading



**Pathways to Partnership**  
How You and Your Church can Join the Replanting Movement

Bob Bickford & Mark Hallock

Available Now

