

# CHURCH-TO-CHURCH COLLABORATIONS ON THE RISE

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Survey of Externally Focused Churches Finds That Food Programs and Emergency Assistance Top the List

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*by Krista Petty*

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According to the latest Hartford Institute for Religion Research national survey of U.S. faith communities, interfaith activity among faith communities has more than tripled since 2000. The survey, sponsored by the Cooperative Congregational Studies Partnership, found that two out of ten congregations reported participation in an interfaith worship service in the past year. That statistic doubles when it comes to participating in a community service activity. Nearly four in ten congregations reported joining in multiple church community service activities across the United States.<sup>1</sup>

A survey of churches in the Leadership Network Externally Focused Churches Leadership Community delivered similar results. Churches are stepping up to work together in community service ministry. The following list highlights the primary ways these churches say they have worked with other churches for community service in the past 12 months.

- *Food programs (such as a food pantry, Meals on Wheels, etc.)*
- *Emergency assistance (providing food, clothing or short term financial assistance)*
- *Child and youth programs (tutoring, youth sports, etc.)*
- *Housing programs (Habitat for Humanity, homeless shelter work)*
- *Prison ministry*
- *Medical and dental programs*
- *Immigrant ministries*
- *Special one-day project work*

While most partnered for emergency assistance programs, many churches surveyed are *most involved* in cooperative programs involving children and youth followed by housing programs, one-day project-oriented work and projects supporting local schools. These churches also reported that they came together for prayer just as much as they gathered for community service work.

In the Hartford Survey, David Roozen, director of the Cooperative Congregational Studies Partnership recognizes the events of September

11, 2001 as a pivotal moment in the increase of interfaith activity. “The September 11 upturn in interfaith awareness has been accompanied by a fundamental change in the United States’ perception of the American religious mosaic,” he states.<sup>2</sup>

A number of the externally focused churches surveyed by Leadership Network claim they worked together to respond to a crisis in the past 12 months. Some even note this is what originally sparked their interest in partnering with other churches.

Responses to Hurricane Katrina in 2005 certainly strengthened the commitment to church unity in Lexington, KY. After the hurricane struck the Gulf Region, a number of Lexington-area churches started meeting on a regular basis to unify their response and assistance. With a history of planting Journey Christian Church together in the New Orleans area, these churches obviously wanted to not only help the church they had planted but help them rebuild their city. Missy Cheeseman, director of extensions ministry at **Crossroads Christian Church** (<http://www.xroadschurch.org>) says, “I got to know of a para-church organization called Crossroads Missions and realized they would come to us to build houses and I started asking other church leaders if they wanted to help in this way. We ended up with six churches building six houses.” [Crossroads Missions is not a ministry of Crossroads Christian Church. Learn more about them at <http://www.Crossroadsmissions.com>.]

Coordinating this kind of effort took a lot of collaboration and division of responsibilities. Crossroads Church coordinated the building effort with Crossroads Mission while **Southland Christian Church** (<http://www.southlandchristian.org>) handled the food and publicity. Each of the six churches recruited volunteers (which totaled over 400 collectively) and funded their own build.



Crossroads Missions and 5 other churches came together and built 6 houses after Hurricane Katrina struck in 2005.



MISSY CHEESEMAN

“It was one of the first times area churches had come together to do something ‘outside of ourselves.’ It wasn’t to benefit any one of our own churches—it was to benefit New Orleans. It brought church leaders, members, and families together,” shares Missy. Without partnering with other churches, she is confident that only one house would have gotten accomplished instead of six and believes it could be the start of many future endeavors. “It was a great first step.

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The churches in our area are committed to the idea that this is how it should be—collectively we should and could and will look to the bigger Kingdom of God which is our community and our world. I have gotten to know the missions leaders from a number of other churches not just in meetings sitting across the table, but in partnership with each other accomplishing a common goal. That has really opened the doors to dreaming of what could be.”

### About Crossroads Missions

“I heard about Crossroads Missions while at an advisory board meeting for Building Better Communities in New Orleans. Crossroads is a missions organization who builds simple, functional houses. They will bring all the supplies to your location, coordinate and oversee building day and then transport the house to its final location, where another group stands the house up, puts the roof on and finishes out the house. A number of churches here have been involved in Habitat Houses in one capacity or another, but this allowed us to build a number of houses for little money (approx \$6500/house) and to involve 40-60 volunteers per house—all onsite, one day, at one time.”  
*Missy Cheeseman*

The churches in Lexington have not waited long to partner again. They are coming together to serve their own city this time, with hopes of deploying 1000 people across Lexington to serve on one day in 2007. “I think it is all of our hopes that it isn’t just church volunteers, but also community volunteers, advertising the opportunity for participation to the community. Imagine, what a great opportunity to break down the walls between the local church and the people of the community through serving together,” says Missy.

### Feeding People Together

An overwhelming amount (87%) of the externally focused churches surveyed say they participate with other churches for local food programs, followed by emergency assistance (75%), child and youth programs (70%), and housing programs (66%).

Ask just about anyone in Longmont, CO what the OUR (Outreach United Resource) Center (<http://www.ourcenter.org>) is and they can probably tell you it’s a great place to have a free lunch and it is vital to the well-being of Longmont citizens. What they might not know is that this 20-year-old community service organization began out of collaborative efforts launched by the Longmont Ministerial Association in 1986 in response to a local crisis.



OUR Center staff, board members and volunteers pray before the 20th Anniversary celebration at the Boulder County Fairgrounds in September 2006.

The Longmont area churches in Boulder County found out that pain is often an agent for change. When a local organization that orchestrated an emergency food pantry closed its doors at about the same time another local church food and clothing pantry discontinued due to increased demand and budget shortfall, Alan Landes of **Central Presbyterian Church** (<http://www.centralpres.net>) coordinated a series of public meetings. He and others were deeply concerned about the welfare of the needy in the

city and what the new lack of services would mean to all of the churches. Realizing that people with important needs were turning to churches for help, there was concern that in some cases individual churches alone were not able to meet the needs. They agreed that uniting community resources would give better help and a consistent place to meet those needs.



The OUR Center anniversary celebration was a party full of activities and entertainment, including these Hispanic dancers from the community.

With over 25 other churches by his side, Alan and the Longmont Ministerial Association began to assess the needs of this Colorado city and how to meet them in the most effective and efficient way possible. In 1987, the OUR Hospitality Center was opened in partnership with the Emergency Family Assistance Association of Boulder. In less than four months, this new center helped meet the food, clothing and furniture needs of 7,000 people. With volunteers from churches and community, they also launched a free hot lunch program.<sup>3</sup>



Christians from a variety of churches in Lexington pray over the home they built for New Orleans.

Truly a community-based agency, today this center is not affiliated with any one church but a collection of 1,500 donors, including churches, individuals, businesses, service clubs and local government. In 2005, the OUR Center:

- *Served 63,000 meals*
- *Distributed 512,000 pounds of emergency groceries*
- *Provided utility shut-off prevention for 290 families*
- *Sheltered 85 families*
- *Fed, clothed, transported, offered medical screenings, job and housing referrals to 194 homeless individuals*
- *Cared for 69 children in the recently opened OUR Child Care Center*

Local churches still play a vital role in the success of this 501(c)(3) by holding food, clothing and coat drives. They also assist in the financial support and the center boasts that only 15% of the total budget is used on administrative and fundraising activity. More importantly, local church volunteers account for a significant portion of the 600 volunteers that provided over 41,000 hours of work in 2005. The board of the center is an eclectic mix of leaders from the community and local churches. According to David Wright, President of the OUR Center Board, "Collaborating with local churches, individuals, businesses, and civic groups has always been the foundation of the OUR Center's success in meeting needs."

### Partnering for Projects

Twenty-one percent of externally focused churches surveyed noted their cooperative involvement in project-based work days. In Little Rock, Boulder, Atlanta, Chicago and Columbia they call it *ShareFest*. In Longmont, CO and San Leandro, CA it's named *A Time to Serve*. In Tampa Bay and Houston, it's called *Somebody Cares* and in Long Beach, CA, it is labeled *Serve Day*. No matter what you call it, large-scale, one-weekend city-wide service events have been blessing and benefiting schools, individuals, churches and entire communities. The goal of most of these project-based church partnerships is often two-fold: to bless the city by accomplishing much needed projects and to show unity in sharing the gospel of Christ.



The impact of ShareFest in Central Arkansas has had a far-reaching, positive effect. This annual event, which began in 1999, unites almost 100 churches in the greater Little Rock area in an effort "to demonstrate the love of Christ through tangible acts of service," notes <http://www.sharefest.org>. The weekend event includes a blood drive, a community service workday, an ingathering of donated items (food, coats, etc.) and a community-wide celebration on a Sunday evening. During the past five years of ShareFest in Central AR there has been over \$1 million of manpower and materials invested in

refurbishing over 40 public schools, as well as many neighborhoods, homes, and public buildings. They have also collected \$700,000 in actual cash that has been shared with 20 nonprofit organizations meeting community needs. Now, more than a dozen cities across the country are blessing their communities with service event days modeled after this original ShareFest in Central Arkansas.



82 year-old Ginnie Black, from Good Shepherd Presbyterian dusting books at Covenant Presbyterian during Serve Day 2006.

Serve Day in Long Beach, CA (<http://www.serveday.org>) is another example of project-based work uniting churches cross denominationally. For this one-day service event, 28 churches come together to accomplish 1,200 hours of community service with projects in both Los Angeles and Orange County. Over 4,000 volunteers are involved. Ginnie Black, 82 years old from **Good Shepherd Presbyterian Church** in Los Alamitos, CA (<http://gspc.org/>) is one of those volunteers. She dusted shelves and books in the church library

from her chair because she can't stand for long periods of time. But she wasn't dusting the books at her own church home of 43 years. She was cleaning and organizing the inner city church library of Covenant Presbyterian. "Our church is a little more affluent than Covenant," shares Ginnie. "We love the people from this church and the wonderful job they do." At a recent women's event, she says that they asked everyone from Good Shepherd to bring a child's book for the Covenant Presbyterian library.



Not limited by your stature, only the size of your heart. 6-year old Ashley at Serve Day 2006.

As Ginnie is helping in the library, just down the street at the Christian Outreach in Action (COA) six-year-old Ashley and her mom, Dawn, are part of a landscaping volunteer team. This mom and daughter team volunteers with Serve Day through Light and Life Church, Long Beach. The COA is a nonprofit dedicated to breaking the cycle of poverty and homelessness in Long Beach

(<http://www.coalongbeach.org>). Teams of volunteers from a variety of churches assisted in their mission during Serve Day. This means a lot to COA Executive Director, Jeanne Pacini. "We like to spend every dollar of fundraising on our clients." When churches send supplies and volunteers to do the labor on facility projects, she is able to meet that goal. Serve Day teams landscaped, painted the basement level warehouse as well as a room in the upper level of the facility.

Painting in the basement that day were Leslie and her seven-year-old son William, who gave up a Saturday morning baseball game to serve. "We want to help people," says William.

Jeanne not only had church volunteers, the day before a group from Campus Crusade was there to help prep the warehouse for the painting project. "It's a miracle that when these people say they will do anything, they really mean it." When churches and organizations collaborate for large projects at her facility, Jeanne says that it does more than save money. "Landscaping will help the relationship with our neighbors. Painting the warehouse will brighten the space and people will feel more respect. We like to help people and treat them with dignity at the same time."

Forty-seven-year-old attorney, Paula Tripp (a member of Grace Brethren Church) served as a Serve Day project manager for "Almost Extreme Makeover." Paula made phone calls, supply lists and worked with the homeowners to prepare for a day of landscaping, repair and organization. There are several reasons she is willing to organize this project with friends from her church at Grace Brethren as well as strangers from other churches. As an adoptive single mother of two boys, she has been the beneficiary of help from her church family. "This was the first church that felt like home because of its outward focus," she says.



Paula Tripp, of Grace Brethren organizes a Long Beach home during Serve Day 2006.

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How better to serve than having a lot of people working together? Setting aside differences speaks volumes about why we are here and what we are doing." Through Serve Day, Paula, Ginnie, Ashley and Jeanne were living examples of Psalm 133:1, "How good and pleasant it is when brothers live together in unity!"

**Alliances for Community Youth Services**

A high majority (70%) of externally focused churches surveyed say they are most involved in child and youth programs with other churches. **Faith Lutheran Church** in Golden, CO (<http://www.faithgolden.org>) has a very integrated program that focuses on youth. After his first year at Faith, Ty Wilson, Youth Ministry Area Leader, was feeling disillusioned with the typical student ministry model. "I was frustrated at being a one-man show. I felt like a lone ranger," says Ty. He began envisioning a more integrated, community-

wide ministry to students where youth coaches and ministers could work alongside one another for greater results.

When a new youth pastor came to town, Ty shared his ideas. "We went from a place of working to visioning," he says. What resulted is a cooperative student ministry called The

Ascent where five key churches share in the vision, planning, and work of reaching middle and high school students in Golden. The student ministers from various churches, including Baptist, Presbyterian, Episcopal, Lutheran, Community Church and Evangelical Free meet three hours weekly to go over details and logistical items. "We

Through Serve Day, Paula is using her gifts of organization and leadership, while at the same time supporting something she believes in: church unity. "Too often, you hear about the little things that separate churches. Those little things are not important.

also have a full day retreat (as a cooperative staff) for spiritual direction once a month," says Ty.

Together, these churches plan camps, monthly large group gatherings, weekly small groups as well as service and mission projects. He notes that one benefit of working in tandem is the ability to work towards "giftedness" rather than doing everything in a vacuum. Resources also go further together than alone. The churches in the cooperative ministry are various sizes, but collectively, they have a budget of \$45,000. And they really do believe in sharing those resources. "Sharing resources means anything and everything. Two other churches have vans and I am on their drivers' lists," he says.

Beyond sharing resources and the workload, Ty sees an additional benefit to the cooperative effort. "Our unity is becoming real because it is for the sake of a larger purpose. It's easier to set aside agendas because it is about the students of Golden and the Kingdom of God." What happens when differences do arise? He laughs, "We build an altar and dance to see who gets the fire! No seriously, we find that a person gives and there's always room for compromise."

Since the start of The Ascent cooperative youth ministry, these churches have seen greater interest in their small groups program called spelunking groups. "We have 80 kids in small groups which are based around common interests," says Ty. Their "expeditions" are immersion experiences based around the theme of lighting up the darkness by sharing the good news in word and deed. Expeditions typically come in the form of mission trips, service projects, and retreats. In 2006, The Ascent Expeditions included a weekend serving in downtown Denver, two trips to build homes in Juarez, and serving a rural farming community in Northeastern Colorado.

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The seven churches of the Golden Family of Churches Health Ministries actively work together to enhance the health of their community.

## Partnering for HealthCare



The Golden Family of Churches Health Ministries in Golden Colorado.

Thirty-seven percent of surveyed churches said they partner for medical and/or dental programs in their community. Like the youth ministry partnership, Faith Lutheran Church also has a collaborative effort in the area of health care called the Golden Family of Churches Health Ministries. In this partnership relationship, seven

churches work together to enhance the health of their Colorado community. The seven churches in this network are very diverse denominationally and include:

- *Calvary Episcopal*  
<http://www.calvarygolden.net>
- *Faith Lutheran Church*  
<http://www.FaithGolden.org>
- *First Presbyterian Church*  
[www.goldenpresbyterian.org/](http://www.goldenpresbyterian.org/)
- *First United Methodist Church*  
<http://goldenfirstumc.org/>
- *Mesa View Evangelical Church*  
<http://www.mesaviewchurch.org/index.html>
- *St. Joseph's Catholic Parish*  
<http://www.stjoegold.org/>
- *Seventh-Day Adventist Church*



KAREN SETZER

Karen Setzer, parish nurse at Faith Lutheran, believes that partnering with other churches simply “makes so much more sense!” From the start of this endeavor eight years ago, the groups of health leaders from the churches had a desire for partnership. Karen says, “This organization is its own 501(c)(3) under Faith Lutheran Church. We are funded by various means, including each church’s financial contribution, the local Lion’s Club, and various grants. The collective board from all churches includes a treasurer and three co-chairs.”

Cooperatively they provide a number of health and human service-related services for the community. They provide free childhood

immunization vouchers through the Jefferson County Health Department as well as flu shots. They offer a community health fair annually, graciously hosted each year by St. Joseph’s Catholic Church. The health fair includes a number of services like free consultations from volunteering physicians, pharmacists and counselors; blood pressure and pulmonary function testing; massages and even toenail trimming. “Several board members have a relationship with a school in Golden, so that every school is covered,” says Karen. They also communicate through a monthly newsletter, the fire departments and other civic organizations.

They host several community blood drives throughout the year and publish a resource directory including information on emergency, medical, health, food, and support group information. The Golden Family of Churches Health Ministries also provides support groups, health seminars, classes and a monthly continuing educational health speaker to support the knowledge base of the ministry.

Through their Interfaith Hospitality Network (INH), this group also offers housing for families who are temporarily homeless. A family in need is housed at the Seventh-Day Adventist Gym for two weeks (up to five times a year). All meals the second week are provided by Golden Family of Churches Health Ministries, while the Seventh-Day Adventist church provides the transportation. They emphasize self sufficiency and help 70% of people in their program find permanent or transitional housing and 65% find jobs or improve their financial situation. They help an average of 15 people each week. Two doctors and one nurse from Faith Lutheran began a medical program for guests of the INH in the past year, setting up a two-room clinic. This new ministry joined the long time operating Faith Lutheran dental program.

Truly a collaborative effort, Karen says they support one another’s churches to the best of their abilities. “When the gym needed to be remodeled at Seventh-Day Adventist, home to our Interfaith Hospitality Network, all the churches helped in some way to fund the work.” They also support one another through hosting events and sharing volunteers.

Having done such a good job of providing health service to their county, the Golden Family of Churches Health Ministries received the distinguished honor and affirmation from the Jefferson County "Turning Vision Into Action" award in 2006.

### Power of Three

Why not go it alone in community service? All the church to church partnerships and collaborative efforts listed above are not without difficulty. The externally focused church survey notes that

not all efforts between churches are perfect. There are often obstacles to overcome and compromises made. The survey shows that lack of initiation, project leadership, shared vision and resources as primary issues facing churches that wish to partner. In addition to those leading problems, sometimes simple logistics like location and church size

create barriers to effectively working together. Surprisingly, only 1% of the survey participants noted doctrinal difference as a major obstacle to partnering with other churches.

But Ecclesiastes 4:12 says, "Though one may be overpowered, two can defend themselves. A cord of three strands is not quickly broken." That may be the reason many churches choose to focus on

the benefits of church to church partnerships over the obstacles. An overwhelming majority (96%) of churches surveyed report that kingdom building is their goal for working with other churches.

Some churches are so dedicated to the unity of churches for community service that they have allotted staff time and

resources to development of partnerships. Eric Marsh began Hope for Long Beach (HfLB, <http://www.hflb.org>) as a ministry of Grace Brethren Church to specifically focus on community agency and church partnerships. Their vision statement reads, "Hope for Long Beach exists to extend mercy and justice in our city through mobilizing the church to serve and by developing strategic partnerships. The vision of our church and HfLB was written considering the larger picture of God's work in Long Beach, not solely our church."



ERIC MARSH

This summer HfLB gathered leaders from several local churches to form a learning group that met once a week to discuss the questions, challenges and hopes raised in equipping churches to be externally focused and kingdom-centered. After ten weekly meetings, the group came together and invited senior leaders from their churches to share what God did this summer. "We were overwhelmed with the positive feedback and the way that God is so clearly working in and through this group. A number of pastors who've been in Long Beach for many years shared that this is the first time they've seen churches come together in a sustainable way," says Tracy Turner, HfLB operations manager. These leaders are open to learning from one another and together understanding God's mission in their city.

One benefit of churches partnering together is the sharing of abilities and resources. Along with leading Hope for Long Beach, Eric Marsh is instrumental in the annual Serve Day (noted above). Why do Eric and the Serve Day leadership team put so much effort into church partnerships for this one day of service? "How does the movement of the gospel break out? I believe so much can be done when we are not being petty, but unified. There is one Church in this city and if we put aside the things that are negotiable then we can actually be a unified front for the gospel of Christ. More often than not, unity is developed shoulder to shoulder rather than face to face," says Eric.

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He also can't say enough about the benefits of sharing abilities when it comes to pulling off an event that mobilized 4,000 people for Serve Day. "Heather Motichiko, from RockHarbor is an administrative and operational genius. David Trotter with Revolution Church is awesome with marketing. Mike Kenyon is a great motivator and I can pastor the team and run a tight meeting." With each of their diverse abilities, he believes they can do more together than apart.

Other churches have incorporated a strategic "path step" to partnering and have gone as far as creating a separate nonprofit and hired a staff person to serve as an intentional liaison between the partnering churches. **Calvary Community Church, Westlake Village, CA** (<http://www.calvaryc.org>) felt a strong desire to see partnerships with other churches become intentional. They formed and staffed a group called ACTION—Area Christians Taking Initiatives On Needs. Kirk DeWitt, Community and World Pastor, says, "We gathered five other churches to learn more about a partnership plan from an organization called Agents of Grace. Following that meeting, four of the churches decided to come

together to create the nonprofit ACTION." Though they are in the beginning stages, ACTION has its first director and is creating a board of directors to take steps towards community service.

Forming a nonprofit is just one of the many ways churches organizationally manage their more formal partnership, although 52% of the churches surveyed consider their partnerships to be somewhat loose and informal. To help partnerships operate more smoothly, a number of the surveyed churches made the following adjustments:

*Used a different name than any one church itself — 25%*

*Formed a separate 501(c)(3) — 16%*

*Established a separate board or advisory panel — 12%*

*Established a separate budget or line-item in the church budget — 12%*

According to Eric Marsh, Serve Day is not a formal agreement, but more of a "handshake relationship." "We are a living example of a covenant for unity," he says. (For more detailed information on the structure, communication and funding for Serve Day, see Leadership Network's paper on Six Catalytic Service Approaches at [http://www.leadnet.org/resources\\_downloads.asp](http://www.leadnet.org/resources_downloads.asp)).



Participants of ACTION come together to pray.

### A Covenant of Unity

Some churches may formalize their agreements through covenants. In his book, *City Impact*, author and church mobilizer Daniel Bernard describes a covenant signed by churches in the Tampa Bay area that are part of an evangelistic and community service initiative called Somebody Cares Tampa Bay.<sup>4</sup> According to Bernard, "When we speak of unity, we are not speaking of anything goes. More than two hundred pastors in Tampa Bay signed a covenant of unity that is now being adopted in part or in whole by other cities."<sup>4</sup> Some of the highlights to the Tampa Bay church covenant include an agreement to:

1. Love God with our all, and the church fervently, doing all things in love.
2. Pray for and encourage each other.
3. Speak well of one another at all times.
4. Hold one another accountable.
5. Keep the bond of peace with the Body of Christ.
6. Be real and transparent with one another, resisting the temptation to impress each other with our size, abilities and accomplishments.
7. Advertise in a manner that is positive to the Body of Christ, and not self-promoting.
8. Mobilize our members and promote area-wide strategies and programs to evangelize and impact our cities with the Gospel of Christ.<sup>5</sup>

Whether church partnerships form a nonprofit, have a covenant or maintain a looser, “relational” collaboration, Eric has this advice to give during the infancy stage of creating partner relationships for community service:

- *Put money and time into training.*
- *Key leaders have to be committed to the concept of partnerships and community service.*
- *Clarify goals and mission as a leadership team.*
- *Don't feel the need to grow exponentially. "Take time to wisely plan," says Eric.*
- *Look for community networks to tap into. "Everything happens best with networks!" he says.*
- *Set a shelf life and evaluate your partnership at the prime of the collaboration.*

## Stages of Collaboration

There are a variety of words church leaders may choose to use when describing their mutually beneficial relationships: partner, cooperate, team together or lend a hand. Twenty-five percent of the churches surveyed chose the word “collaborate” to describe the way they interact with other churches.

What does it take to have a mutually satisfying, positive and productive collaboration? Tom McGehee, founder and president of WildWorks Group, suggests potential partners gain an understanding of seven principles of collaboration. In his work with both churches and Fortune 500 companies, Tom facilitates strategic planning and collaborative efforts, including company mergers. He outlines the principles of collaboration as knowledge, understanding, decision/action, honest conversation, working to win, presence and a sense of discovery. “The first three are based on actions. The last four are attitudes,” says Tom. All are vital to the success of any collaborative effort. When entering into an initial phase of working together, church leaders could ask the following questions of themselves and the entire collaborative team:

- **Knowledge:** *What does our group need to know to do what we need to do?*
- **Understanding:** *Is the knowledge we have in context of the problem we have to solve?*
- **Decision/Action:** *Do we have the ability to make the right decisions and take action on them?*
- **Honest Conversation:** *Do we all agree to speak openly and candidly about the things that need to be talked about?*
- **Work to Win:** *Do each of us at the table have a results-oriented attitude?*
- **Presence:** *Are each of us disciplined enough to bring our full selves into the meeting?*
- **Sense of Discovery:** *Do we have a desire to learn, experience and achieve more together than apart?<sup>6</sup>*

In the book *The Collaboration Challenge*, James Austin describes the importance of collaborations and understanding their unique stages of development. “Alliances are vehicles for achieving each participant’s mission, so partnering should be considered an integral part of any nonprofit or company strategy.”<sup>7</sup> Austin, who is a professor at Harvard University Graduate School for Business Management, describes three stages of collaboration, which he calls the “Collaboration Continuum.”

### Stage One: Philanthropic

*“Collaboration in the philanthropic stage is highly circumscribed in terms of resources deployed and points of interactions.”<sup>8</sup>*

Churches actually have a long history of collaborating for resource deployment. Through organizations like Pioneer Bible Translators, Campus Crusade, Christian Missionary Fellowship and Overseas Missionary Fellowship, churches have collectively financially supported foreign missions projects, college campus ministries and more. Church members also occasionally have points of interaction with the agency or the missionaries themselves.

Following the collapse of the World Trade Center in New York on 9-11, the Orchard Planting Group, a New York-based church planting



PAUL WILLIAMS

organization, collected \$1million from approximately 300 churches to deploy to business owners and individuals living at ground zero. On the five year anniversary of the tragedy, Paul Williams, Orchard President and New Yorker reflected on the results of churches banding together. "I think 9-11 changed everything. The atmosphere and receptivity patterns have changed. The partnerships (with churches) were huge for us at that time and we were able to disperse funds when other organizations hadn't gotten started. At ground zero people still say to us 'You were to the first (to help).'"

With the financial help of so many churches, the Orchard Group has been able to respond to this newly found receptiveness to the gospel by planting three churches in the New York City area: **Mosaic Manhattan** (<http://www.mosaicmanhattan.com>) which was a joint venture with Saddleback Valley Community Church in 2002; **Forefront Christian Church** (<http://www.forefrontchurch.com>) launched in 2005; and **Church of Park Slope** (<http://www.churchofparkslope.org>) also started in 2005.

### About Agents of Grace

AOG was formed in 2002 at Westover Church in response to the events of 9-11. With the desire to provide an easy way to connect people of faith directly into community service, AOG sponsored their first Mission Greensboro event in 2002, with over 1200 volunteers serving 50 nonprofit agencies including schools and public parks. The Agents of Grace ministry has developed a model for churches across the U.S. to adapt and replicate. <http://www.agentsofgrace.org>

### Stage Two: Transactional

*"In the transactional stage, organizations carry out their resource exchanges through specific activities...Engagements of the partners is more active at this stage and the value flow more significantly two-way."*<sup>9</sup>

In the business sector, Austin notes that company volunteer programs often emerge as extensions of financial donation made to a supporting nonprofit, moving the collaboration from

philanthropic to transactional.<sup>10</sup> In the church leadership context, churches may also move their collaborations from one stage to the next, deepening the commitment to community service overall.

In transactional collaborations, leaders may exchange some technical expertise and resources to complete or communicate for a common project. When **Creekside Community Church** in San Leandro, CA decided it was time for them to launch an A Time to Serve event in their church, they chose not to do it alone, but to include and expose other local churches to the idea of serving the community as well. One of the churches invited to partner for the one-time service event was the local Chinese Bible church. "They had never done anything externally focused before. We have grown to love each other and now they are also having their own service ministries as well," says Kathy Greer, director of community services for Creekside. Through the exchange of ideas with other churches, Creekside has become a significant resource to the other local churches, extending community service in San Leandro further than they could alone.



KATHY GREER

### Stage 3: Integrative.

*In the third and final stage of collaboration, organizations "begin to look like a highly integrated joint venture that is central to both organizations' strategies," notes Austin. What are indicators of this deeper level of integration? Austin notes that organizations in this stage often display "mutual mission relationship."*<sup>11</sup>

Churches in this stage, like The Golden Family of Churches Health Ministries (as previously detailed) may exhibit the following traits:

- *Extending collaboration beyond a project to meeting the long-term needs*
- *Intensified staff and lead volunteer interactions*
- *Creation of processes and procedures to manage growing complexity*
- *Broadened scope of joint activities and ventures*
- *Increased need for committed resources of time and money*

## Where do You Want to Be?

Understanding these stages of engagement can be beneficial when looking to start a partnership venture. “Where an alliance falls on the continuum is determined by the strategic choices and actions of its partners. Knowing where you

### KNOWING WHERE YOU ARE IS CRITICAL TO DECIDING WHERE YOU WANT TO BE.

are is critical to deciding where you want to be,” writes Austin.<sup>12</sup>

So where do churches want to be in their strategic partnerships? How do they measure effectiveness in these

collaborative efforts? The churches surveyed had varied methods of measuring success. Some even noted difficulty and improvement needed in this area. The following list shows the most widely used forms of measuring success. (Survey participants could choose as many as applicable.)

- Witness of unity to the community (71%)
- Total number of people served (52%)
- Total number of volunteers (52%)
- Number of new relationships formed (47%)
- Number of service events (31%)
- Number of first time volunteers (33%)

Some of the most positive results in churches partnering with one another can't be measured in numbers, but improved perception and relational blessing. One survey participant shared that partnerships “breathed new life into

### NINETY-TWO PERCENT OF THE CHURCHES SURVEYED INTEND TO INCREASE THEIR NUMBER OF CHURCH PARTNERSHIPS.

church leadership,” while another said that partnering “helped build favor in the city.” First Evangelical Free Church of Fullerton, CA has seen the positive results of kingdom-building together in the city, “Three churches from our area partnered together to serve the city of Placentia. We had

about 300 volunteers working on ten projects. At the city council meeting, they invited the leaders from each church to come. They showed a

presentation of the day, and handed out certificates of appreciation to each church and the volunteers who coordinated the projects. They mentioned how much it was appreciated and looked forward to partnering again in the future.”

Pete Menconi, outreach pastor of **Greenwood Community Church**, Greenwood Village, CO (<http://www.greenwoodcc.com>) agrees that partnering is beneficial to reach the city. He shares, “We have started a metrowide ministry focused on bringing church and para-church ministries to reach our city for Jesus Christ. We have seen pastors and ministry leaders meet each other for the first time, compare notes and begin to cooperate and collaborate in ministry. Multiple church events and projects have become commonplace. There is a new atmosphere of partnership and collaboration in our city.”

Overall, it looks as if this trend in more collaborative ventures among churches will continue. Ninety-two percent of the churches surveyed intend to increase their number of church partnerships, rather than decrease or simply remain the same. Unity among churches for kingdom work is probably best summed up by Daniel Bernard who often tells churches in the Tampa Bay area, “The kingdom work is bigger than any one of us, so it needs every one of us.”<sup>13</sup>

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KRISTA PETTY



ERIC SWANSON

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## ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup> <http://fact.hartsem.edu/FACT2006news.html>

<sup>2</sup> <http://fact.hartsem.edu/FACT2006news.html>

<sup>3</sup> information on the history of the OUR Center is taken from an article, From Humble Beginnings, in the Summer 2006 Issue of OUR News, written by volunteer John Maher.

<sup>4</sup> <http://missionamerica.org>

<sup>5</sup> Bernard, Daniel, *City Impact*, Baker Publishing, Grand Rapids, MI, 2004, pg. 43

<sup>6</sup> McGehee, Tom, *Successful Workteams*, The WildWorks Group, 2005, pg. 19-20

<sup>7</sup> Austin, James, *The Collaboration Challenge*, Jossey-Bass, San Francisco, CA, 2000, pg.15

<sup>8</sup> Austin, James, *The Collaboration Challenge*, Jossey-Bass, San Francisco, CA, 2000, pg.21

<sup>9</sup> Austin, James, *The Collaboration Challenge*, Jossey-Bass, San Francisco, CA, 2000, pg.22

<sup>10</sup> Austin, James, *The Collaboration Challenge*, Jossey-Bass, San Francisco, CA, 2000, pg.23

<sup>11</sup> Austin, James, *The Collaboration Challenge*, Jossey-Bass, San Francisco, CA, 2000, pg.26

<sup>12</sup> Austin, James, *The Collaboration Challenge*, Jossey-Bass, San Francisco, CA, 2000, pg.39

<sup>13</sup> Bernard, Daniel, *City Impact*, Baker Publishing, Grand Rapids, MI, 2004, pg. 66