

# CREATING STRATEGIC ALLIANCES AND PARTNERSHIPS FOR PLANTING NEW CHURCHES

Issues Involved in Sharing Information and  
Resources Toward Greater Evangelism

*by Sherri Brown*

## **Article Summary**

In Major cities across America, alliances and partnerships are being formed between churches to achieve the goal of evangelism. These partnerships can be as simple as two pastors working together in one community or a group of churches working together to transform a city. This paper addresses the reasons churches are forming, how they do it, and some of the advantages and challenges they have found.

## **Further Reading**

[Becoming a Church Planting Church: Issues Pastors Address When Leading a Church to Birth a Network of New Churches](#)

By Sherri Brown

[Models For Raising Up Church Planters](#)

By Glenn Smith

[Finding Church Planters: Discovering and Discerning Those God Has Called to Start the Next Generation of Churches](#)

By Josh Hunt

A few weeks before a young minister began as a pastor in a new town, he decided to visit the largest-attendance church in the area, just two blocks from his own new church. As he sat through a worship service he decided quickly that he “could do church better than this.”

It didn’t take long after leaving that worship service to realize his attitude was “ugly.”

Neil Cole is a pastor, church planter and author of several books, including *The Organic Church*. He is also the pastor who decided he needed to apologize for his judgmental attitude that surfaced while sitting in the pew at his neighboring church.

“I wrote a letter to that pastor,” he says. “I confessed what I had done and I committed to pray for that church every time I passed its facility. Since it was just two blocks away, that meant I prayed for them a lot,” he admits.

His honesty and humility led to a friendship with the pastor and ultimately to the collaboration of authoring two books together.

“That was my first experience partnering with another church,” Neil reports. “It was Conservative Baptist and I was Grace Brethren. I learned that if a relationship is from your heart, it can be a natural flow. You approach leaders humbly, wanting their success more than your own. You listen. You ask good questions. You work with the ones who will work with you and you keep praying for the ones who won’t,” he says. In major cities across America, alliances and partnerships are being formed between churches



Many church leaders are joining hands to reach their communities more effectively despite differing backgrounds and denominations.

to achieve the goal of evangelism. The dictionary definitions of partnership and alliances are similar: a partnership is a relationship between individuals or groups characterized by mutual cooperation and responsibility, in order to achieve a specific goal; an alliance is an agreement between two or more parties, made in order to advance common goals.

Sometimes partnerships are as simple as two pastors working together in one community. Sometimes partnerships become strategic alliances among a group of churches working toward a common goal. This paper will address the reasons churches are forming partnerships and alliances, how they do it, the advantages and challenges they have found, as well as some practices in forming these partnerships and alliances. For the purpose of church planting, several cities and metropolitan areas in the United States are beginning to benefit by strategic partnerships and alliances. For many of the church leaders, they are the only way to reach every man, woman and child with the gospel of Jesus.

“We’re seeing churches across the nation networking with each other for the purpose of church planting,” says Margaret Slusher, director of the Church Planting Leadership Community for Leadership Network. “The greater purpose is reaching every man, woman and child for Christ in a city or a region. They’re crossing denominational lines, sharing information and resources, all for the purpose of seeing people come to Christ.”

Pastors who form successful strategic alliances do so after having decided to work together to further not just an individual church, but to further the kingdom of God.

“There is only one head, one body of Christ and that body doesn’t have a Baptist or Brethren or other denomination’s bumper sticker on it,” Neil says. “You can’t do kingdom work alone, without the kingdom.”

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## Churches Forming Strategic Alliances and Partnerships

Tim Hawks doesn't want merely to grow a church. He wants to see every man, woman and child in his region have the opportunity to go to heaven because someone has told them about Jesus Christ. Tim, senior pastor of **Hill Country Bible Church NW**, in Austin, TX (<http://www.hcbc.com>), knows the people in his church alone won't be able to meet face to face with the 1.4 million people in the greater Austin area, so he set out to work with like minded evangelical Christians to reach Austin for Christ.



Volunteers from Hill country Bible church gear up for "90 days of Blessing" their community to reach Austin for Christ.

Austin, the capitol of Texas, boasts a widely diverse population. Touted as the "live music capital of the world," it also houses the University of Texas and is known as the gateway to the hill country—an area in central Texas that boasts rolling, rugged hills. It's also the city with the highest creativity index score in Richard Florida's book *The Rise of the Creative Class*.

Facing such a diverse culture, Hill Country NW formed a comprehensive five-year plan to reach 10 percent of the population—140,000 people—with the gospel.

The first step to achieve this goal was to form an association with the four churches that Hill Country Bible Church had started.

"This is the first level of our partnership—with our daughter churches. These churches are also rising up to plant other churches. It is truly a collaboration. The senior pastor and an elder of

each church serves on the board of the association. Each church owns part of that five year plan," Tim explains.

For instance, in the next five years, Hill Country Bible Church NW will plant 15 churches. **Hill Country Bible Church Pflugerville**, in Pflugerville, TX (<http://www.hbcpcf.com>) will plant four churches. Demographically and geographically each of these new church plants will be distributed in such a way that every part of the Austin area can be touched by an evangelical witness.

To further enhance its goal, Hill Country NW designed a residency program for church planters. The one-year program includes five months of training in church planting skills with feedback from an experienced team. That is followed by seven months dedicated to gathering a core group and working in the place where the plant will take place.

The partnership between the independent Hill Country NW and its daughter churches was a natural fit, but Tim took it a step further and looked to other churches belonging to several different denominations.

"We began to partner with denominations and churches to help them plant churches. Our primary purpose is to promote evangelism and church planting in the greater Austin area. In order for us to reach every man, woman and child, we know other groups need to do this as well. We want to help the Baptists, the Methodists and whoever else, to plant churches," Tim says. He went looking to share his plan. When he approached a leader among Austin's Baptists, to offer help in church planting, he surprised the man.

"He thought we wanted *him* to help *us*. Of course, the churches we plant will have our doctrinal stance, but in our partnerships, we'll enable others to plant churches as well," he says. "We're willing to help with recruiting, assessing, training, coaching and ongoing relationship development."



Evangelism is the primary purpose bringing together several Austin area churches.

The partnership concept in Austin is attracting more than just people and groups that are recruited.

“We’re identifying church planters who have come to Austin and need help. This is not initiated by us, these are church planters who just show up. With these guys, we identify the ones we consider to be like-minded and we help them. We provide coaching and sometimes we provide funding. We’re not asking church planters to bring much to the table,” Tim says.

**Columbia Crossroads Church** in Columbia, S.C., (<http://www.columbiacrossroads.org>) is looking to achieve the same goal as Hill Country Bible Church. The church has developed two primary strategies: church planting and church partnering.

“We’re trying to reach every man, woman and child in Columbia. We developed **Mission Columbia** (<http://www.missioncolumbia.org>) to do this,” says Jeff Shipman, senior pastor of Columbia Crossroads Church, part of the Evangelical Free Church of America. The alliance now involves 70 churches representing dozens of denominations.

It started in the fall of 2000, when Jeff joined with a few others to develop a strategy to reach the 600,000 people in the Columbia area.

“It came down to discovering that we need each other to be successful. We need them and they need us if we’re committed to reaching every man, woman and child in the area,” he says.

Mission Columbia wasn’t formed only to partner with organizations and churches, but the concept included training all church members to “pray, care, and share.”

“We asked people to pray for three people, then find ways to show they care and, finally, to share the gospel. It was a simple strategy,” Jeff explains.

The Mission Columbia alliance divided the greater Columbia area into seven regions, representing about 30,000 people in each group. Churches in each region are asked to meet regularly with each other.

“We ask them to mobilize and train people in the pews. Every member in every church needs to support the strategy,” he says.



Church members paint a community bench during one of the Mission Columbia project days.

Out of that partnership, the churches came together to do large projects. “We try to do one event per year,” Jeff says. “We take all the projects and put them together in one day. For instance, we’ll have a blood drive, a clothing drive and community work projects. We’ve had as many as 600 people from 35 churches participate in one project.”

Church planting was a natural outgrowth of that partnership of churches, but it wasn’t the final goal of the group. “Church planting is the vehicle. The goal is to reach every man, woman and child with the gospel, which means we’ve got to pray to reach the poor, but also the students, prisoners, Hispanics, everyone,” Jeff says. “I tell my guys, ‘You’re in a NASCAR race and your goal is to get around the track, no matter what name you wear on your chest.’ Here’s my leverage: if your heart is to reach every man, woman and child with the gospel, then you need everyone in order to do it.”

### Why Form Alliances and Partnerships?

Churches are seduced by the success of addition, Neil Cole believes.

“Addition is quicker than multiplication, it fuels our egos, and it makes us feel God is involved when addition happens. Jesus invested in the few, not in multitudes. When Jesus left, he left behind 120 people. That was all. But ultimately they changed the world,” he says.

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Churches must move from addition to multiplication to see a church multiplication movement, Neil says.

“We all began life as a zygote, but we didn’t end there. Multiplied trillions of times over, we look like us. The complex organic systems of the entire world can be reduced to reproduction at the smallest scale, but we must have the big picture in mind,” he says.



NEIL COLE

It’s the same with church planting. It begins with a small group starting a church, but it ends with church multiplication.

Neil defines a multiplication movement as a chain reaction that has its own momentum.

“We must begin to understand that the power for spreading the movement is in each follower of Christ. If we do not see every believer empowered, we will not see a spontaneous multiplication movement,” he says (see Appendix for discipleship resources).

“Church multiplication is not planting a church without multigenerational reproduction,” Neil says. “It’s not gathering and assimilating Christians from other churches to form new ones. It’s also not a centralized leadership development institution that sends out church planters.”

A church multiplication movement requires that each church have the capacity within itself to multiply spontaneously. Even then, it is not church multiplication unless the churches themselves multiply.

Neil explains church multiplication through a series of questions:

What would you do if 100 people came to Christ tomorrow? If 1,000 people came to Christ next week? If 10,000 people came to Christ this month? If one million people came to Christ this year?

“If you don’t have a system that can handle this kind of growth, then you do not have a system that can take a church to spontaneous multiplication,” he says.

## Why Now?

For many the concept is new that churches will cross denominational and cultural lines to come together as equal partners in reaching an area for Christ. For Neil Cole, it’s something that hasn’t happened since the first century.

“Not since the first century has God been speaking on a global basis. Part of it is that we’re getting our heads out of the sand. People are open to talking about the kingdom more often, not just the church.” Neil says.

Leadership Network’s Margaret Slusher agrees, “I see a movement of God like I’ve never seen in ministry. Church planters have realized they are duplicating resources. They keep wondering why they are reinventing the wheel,” she says.

A successful alliance allows each church to keep its own identity, but also join others to share information and resources. “In a partnership, you negotiate what you give up and what you keep,” Margaret says.

Brent Lucy, founder and senior pastor of **New Life Christian Fellowship at Western Branch** in Chesapeake, VA (<http://www.newlifewb.com>), sees the rise of partnerships as a result of the independent church movement.

“In the 1970s there was a big increase in independent churches who chose to move away from a denomination. But these guys are lonely. There has also been a breakdown in accountability. Now they are reconnecting to come together to find innovative ways to reach a city,” Brent says. Pastors in denominations are likewise showing interest in partnering together.

Tom Billings, director of **Union Baptist Association** in Houston, TX, (<http://www.ubahouston.org>) sees the Internet as a factor in the rise of church partnerships.

“The Internet has dramatically changed our ability to communicate and access information. It’s so easy to learn what other churches are doing by just going on the Web and reading. You can easily network with like-minded people, even if they’re not a part of your denomination. This kind of information was never available before the Internet,” Tom says.



Union Baptist Association pastors connecting to find innovative ways to reach Houston.

Crossing denominational lines is happening with church planters, but it's also happening in other areas of church life.

"There was a telling moment a few years ago," Tom recalls. "A Presbyterian church in Houston had called a new pastor. I was watching the service on television when the chair of the search committee announced that the new pastor was coming. He said, 'He's really one of us.' Then he said the man pastors a purpose-driven church and has been studying *Experiencing God*. Those are both Baptist-produced resources, but the Presbyterians felt like it was them, as well. That's when I realized the world has changed. We're learning from each other."

## How to Start Partnerships and Alliances

### 1. Build relationships

For pastors looking to start an alliance with other pastors, Margaret Slusher suggests—based on practices she's seen in leading churches across the country—the first step is to build relationships with pastors in your community.

"Find the people that are ready and willing to work. Find the ones that have the same passion as you do," she says.

Partnerships and alliances are forming in larger cities, but they can also be successful in smaller towns and even in rural areas, Margaret observes. "Principles are principles. There is always tweaking, but principles should work anywhere. People who say, 'It

won't work here,' are making an excuse for not carrying out the mandate of Christ, which is for everyone to hear the word of Christ."

### 2. Work together to avoid duplicating resources

Many partnerships and alliances are formed intentionally, but some grow out of natural relationships. At **Church of the Saviour** in Wayne, PA (<http://www.cosnet.org>), a church planting partnership started with a divorce recovery program.

When Kerry Jones, executive director of Church of the Saviour, wanted to begin a Fresh Start ministry, a national divorce recovery program, he discovered that several other churches in the area were already doing Fresh Start—each group had about 50 participants.



Church of the Saviour in Wayne, PA started a church planting partnership out of a divorce recovery program.

"We also started a men's ministry. We planned a retreat but couldn't get a week-end date at a nearby facility because other churches were doing the same thing,"

Kerry says. "You finally start wondering why you're duplicating all your efforts. We decided one church would do the retreat or program this year, then we'd do it the next year. That started it all. Then we started hosting a satellite worship summit and we contacted others to join us. That really got a network of sorts started," he says.

Although the concept was new to some, it wasn't at all foreign to Kerry. Before joining the church staff at Church of the Saviour, he spent 23 years working with **Campus Crusade** (<http://www.ccci.org>).

"Campus Crusade always built networks. That's what we did, so this was a natural for me," he says. "In the grand scheme of things, I see networks functioning the way church is supposed to function: across all lines. We've got a lot of work to do and it's going to take a whole bunch of folks. When you work overseas, anyone who is a believer is a

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partner. That's what it's going to take here in North America."

At Church of the Saviour, Kerry was told about another pastor who was developing a church plant in Philadelphia and wanted to use the experience to start a regional church planting center.

"We were thinking of doing that ourselves. So, again, we thought let's not recreate the whole thing," he says.

Out of that partnership, the church created the Delaware Valley fund to help start churches in South Jersey, North Delaware and the metropolitan Philadelphia area. During a building program, Church of the Saviour chose to set aside 7.5 percent of the donations for the Delaware Valley fund.

"God was working in their lives to do the same thing as we wanted to do. They went to it in a different way, but our hearts are the same," Kerry says.

Other groups and churches came into the partnership in similar ways. **CityNet** (<http://www.citynetphilly.org>) is a network of Philadelphia churches with the mission to "plant and support gospel-centered churches that will reproduce themselves, engage in a ministry of word and deed in their particular communities, and participate in cooperative ministries, all to accomplish what can only happen in partnership with others."

EACH TIME YOU PARTNER WITH SOMEONE, THEY INTRODUCE YOU TO OTHERS.

"They know the city better than we do and we connect with them. CityNet was started by a missionary that we support, so that's how we found out about it. Then people at CityNet put us in touch with people in the city

that also shared our vision," Kerry says. "It just morphs. You find someone with a like-minded vision and then you find ways for us to assist them and for them to assist us. Each time you partner with someone, they

introduce you to others you don't know who also shares your vision."

The mutual aspect of a partnership is critical, Kerry says. "It goes both ways. Sometimes we run it, but sometimes these groups that want to multiply church plants are able to offer something for us as well."

3. Share people and resources

While many alliances result from a natural flow of relationships, some are formed intentionally. **New Life Fellowship** in Virginia Beach, VA, (<http://www.newlife.cc>), a part of the New Life Ministries network, was at one point a single church. Started in 1981, the evangelical charismatic church first met in a funeral home. By 1995, the church began an intentional plan to plant satellite churches. By 1999, four satellite churches had been formed. In 2003, the New Life churches transformed from one church into individual churches, all belonging to the New Life family of churches. At the same time, the network of churches formed New Life Ministries International, a team responsible for training and mentoring leaders from each of the family churches. New Life Ministries International also oversees new church plants.



New Life Fellowship in Virginia Beach is part of a larger network called New Life Ministries International.

"In the past an individual congregation planted a new church, but as we've evolved, we're moving toward establishing a church multiplication center," says Brent Lucy.

Because leaders believe the traditional classroom setting isn't the most effective way to train church leaders, the center will use a coaching/mentoring approach to training.

“The people that come to us will walk with us. They may serve on an elder team in a church. They may work with a pastor. In all they do, they will acquire practical ministry skills before being released to a church planting team,” Brent says.

During the training, future church planters will spend 10 weeks in each of three areas: spiritual formation, life focus and gifting.

“Sharing our resources to do this gives us a greater impact in a city,” Brent says.

Sometimes, however, churches come together to support each other without anything to offer. Hal Haller, lead pastor at **Church of the Highlands Four Corners** in Lakeland, FL (<http://www.fourcornershighlands.org>), has formed an alliance among churches for the purpose of planting churches. While the church is Southern Baptist and the state Baptist convention put its “stamp of approval” on the project, it is not exclusively Southern Baptist, Hal says. The alliance is strictly about planting churches.

“We’re not offering any perks. The purpose of joining our group is to give, not to the network of churches at large, but giving to each other as individual churches,” Hal says.

Each church is asked to give three things: talents, “toys” and time.

“Church planters each have different skills. We circulate within each other’s churches. We have four regions, so this happens on the local level. We also share toys. One church may have a portable stage in a trailer or a portable baptismal that can travel. If the church is not using those toys anymore, we can hook them up with a church that needs that.

“Then there’s time. We share with each other. We come together to collaborate. There isn’t one guy telling people what to do. We have three guys on a leadership team that oversee this,” Hal says. Along with talents, toys and time, churches in the alliance provide people for crowd-gathering events.

Because of the atmosphere the group has set up, church planter training takes the form of an apprenticeship, not classroom training.

“Of course some classroom training is necessary, but the interchange of ideas and the investment the team makes in a church planter is a big part of the partnership. We customize a plan for each church planter. We expect the apprenticeship to last about a year, but we realize some will be ready sooner and some will be ready later,” Hal explains.

One example of the alliance of churches is Hal’s church, Church of the Highlands Four Corners.

“One church gave us people to help start the church. Another gave money and equipment and others helped with coaching and mentoring,” Hal says. Once the church was healthy and strong, it provided resources to help start another church.

### Seek Like-Minded Church Planters

In Houston, Union Baptist Association, a group of more than 630 Southern Baptist churches in the metropolitan Houston area, has formed an alliance with several different church groups.

“Union Baptist Association is committed to church planting as one of its major missions,” Tom Billings says. “Our goal is to be healthy producing congregations cooperating to transform their communities in Houston and the world. But we’ve realized we can’t do it alone.”

For years, Southern Baptists were a significant presence in Houston, but as the population growth exploded, the churches began to lose ground.

“We were still evangelizing and starting churches, but we couldn’t keep up with the growth,” Tom admits. “We started working on this in the 1980s and by the 1990s we realized we couldn’t do this by ourselves. We decided to look at what the church in Houston is supposed to be. Obviously, it’s broader than just one denomination.”

For the past ten years, church leaders in the association have focused on prayer, research,



sharing information and local ministry. Last year the association hosted an evangelistic crusade called CityFest Houston. The event brought churches, across denominational lines, together for one goal.

“While all of this was going on, some of us were talking about the need for the next step beyond CityFest. We decided we needed to come together around church planting. It grew out of my intent to have a church planting seminary, then it grew even bigger to include multiple denominations.”

That’s when he came up with the idea to write a church planting manifesto and ask fellow pastors to make a public commitment to church planting. In January 2007, about 50 key church planters and denominational leaders met for two days. The first night, participants were asked to sign the manifesto.

“By the end of the weekend, 133 people signed it. It was a symbolic step and now the work begins,” he says.

It wasn’t but a few weeks before the manifesto became even more of an urgent alliance. Population statistics had put the Houston metro area at 5.5 million in July 2006, with a projected growth that would see the population reach 8.2 million in 30 years.

Then in April 2007, new projected growth figures were announced. The population is now expected to double in just 20 years.

“A sense of urgency has accelerated the work of this partnership,” Tom says.

### Advantages and Challenges of Forming Partnerships and Alliances

Collectively, a group of churches and organizations can do more than one church alone. Pooling resources and knowledge from like-minded groups can help take an idea and bring it to reality. However, coming together for the sake of “coming together” can be futile, Neil Cole says.

“Groups that come together just for prayer and unity will never find unity. Without a mission,

without bullets flying over your heads, there will be no unity. When you watch each other’s backs’, you will find unity,” Neil says.

Bob Cargo, church planting director for **Perimeter Church** in Duluth, GA (<http://www.perimeter.followers.net>), works with **Global Church Advancement** (<http://www.gca.cc>) to help provide training and support for church planting.

“Global Church Advancement has basic training for church planters. We provide coaches and supervisors. We have four different Presbyterian denominations, an independent church and a Vineyard church involved with us. We’re all trying to plant churches in the metro Atlanta area. We’d love to see it broaden even from there. If someone is involved in church planting in the area, they can come every month to our meetings,” Bob says.

The meetings provide support, training and encouragement. It’s an important aspect of church planting—one that hasn’t always been available.

When Randy Pope, senior pastor of Perimeter Church, affiliated with Presbyterian Church in America, planted the church 29 years ago, he had never read anything about church planting.

“When I was in seminary there was nothing offered on church planting in North America,” Bob says. “Now there is so much available from so many groups and denominations. Where our theology doesn’t divide us, we can learn from each other. Baby boomers and the younger generations don’t have the denominational loyalty that used to be so strong. The younger generations are willing to agree on the major issues and work together. We want to form alliances with anyone who believes salvation is through Jesus Christ.”

Forming those alliances creates accountability, as well as providing strong resources, Brent Lucy believes. “The advantage of a city-wide

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network is that you're part of something bigger than yourself. I'm accountable in the city and to other people. Shared resources leads to greater impact."

Jeff Shipman agrees. "There is a circle of accountability when you are partnering for church planting. We all work toward a common goal. We work exclusively with pastors. God has ordained these men to be in leadership. We want them to do it well. If they don't get it, they will never be able to move their people."

There will always be significant challenges when leaders from more than one denomination come together for one purpose, says Tom Billings of Houston's Union Baptist Association, the largest Baptist association in the United States.

"The challenge of success will hold some of us back," Tom says. "We have some successful models. The megachurch model often creates a false sense of security. People see large churches with lots of people and think the church as a whole is doing a good job. They just don't realize that we're still losing ground in the city. Success can be a barrier if people think that all we need to do is plant more megachurches.

"I think of it like a restaurant. We need McDonald's. We need cafeterias and we need high-end dining. Everyone isn't going to eat the same thing. Of course, we could survive if we all ate in one restaurant, but we're not going to do that. We just have to remember that the success of one model could get in the way."

Recognizing and maintaining the unique qualities of each church, as well as maintaining distinct doctrinal issues, when partnerships are multi-denominational also can be a challenge.

For Hill Country's Tim Hawks, the key is to not argue about doctrine. Because the Austin, TX, partnership is multi-denominational, each church plant follows the specific doctrine of its denomination.

"A church can't survive while it's arguing over doctrine," Tim says.



Each church in the Austin Texas partnership follows the specific doctrine of its denomination

Kerry Jones knows that "anytime you initiate a new way of partnering you have some who think it's great and others who feel like there is a lot risk. Entrepreneurship can be a challenge. You also want to know that it's going to be a true partnership. I've seen some groups where one church or leader wanted to tell everyone else what to do," he says.

The theological issues can be challenging as well. "The governance issues can vary a lot. Some people hold on to theological issues harder than others, but we don't tell people what to do. We know we're a white suburban church coming into the city. If we come in like a parent and tell them what to do, it will fail. We're ready for diversity so we can all lock arms and reach Philadelphia for Christ," Kerry says.

Humility and strong relationships are a key to success, says Neil Cole. "Sometimes institutions get in the way, but if the group is relational, it's not a problem. I've not experienced any negative problems if all hearts want success of the kingdom."

Margaret Slusher agrees. "The humility factor has to play into this. Pastors have to be able to say, 'It's not mine.'"

Of course, working with pastors can be a challenge in itself, says Jeff Shipman. "You think leading a church is hard, try leading a bunch of pastors. It takes a lot of time to take existing churches and get them moving. You've got to be patient. You cannot give up on the existing church. Pastors don't want to be part of a group

that talks about how bad their church is. They want to do something. That's why we incorporate training people in the pew, as well as partnering with pastors," Jeff explains. He also believes that denominational walls have come down.

"In the seminary where I attended, charismatics were at best confused, at worst they were demonic. That sort of thing has died down. Now, the question we ask is, 'Do you love Jesus?'"

### Touching the World with Christ

No individual church or single denomination can reach every man, woman and child in the United States. That's the belief of leaders who are forming partnerships and alliances to reach entire geographical areas with the gospel of Jesus Christ. As Jeff Shipman of Columbia Crossroads Church says, "We need each other to be successful."

Starting partnerships can be daunting to some, but based on practices seen in leading partnerships, it can be done. The key is to find the church leaders willing to join the partnership and to "not worry" about those who choose to continue working on their own.

Although partnerships and alliances can look different, they have been driven by many of the same advantages: sharing resources, mutual support and encouragement and a more effective way to reach a community for Christ.

Some of the challenges can be intimidating. Managing doctrinal differences and the distinctiveness of individual churches are just a few issues that must be faced in a partnership. But the challenges don't outweigh the possibilities in successful alliances.

It is that possibility for changing the world that drives church leaders to step out into a new concept, a new partnership.

Neil explains this notion with two acronyms. "As leaders and organizations, we have bought into a theology of SAFE," he says.

**S**elf-preservation = mission

**A**voidance of the world/risk = wisdom

**F**inancial security = responsible faith

**E**ducation = maturity

Instead of seeking to be "safe," Christians need a theology of DEATH, he says.

**D**ie daily to who you are.

**E**mpowerment of others is our life.

**A**cceptance of risk is normative.

**T**heology is not just knowledge, it is practice.

**H**old on to Christ, open your hands for all else.

"The irony is that holding on to your life is lethal, embracing death is the only path to live," Neil says. "Having nothing to lose creates a vibrant life, individually and corporately. It is dangerous faith."

## APPENDIX

### HOUSTON CHURCH PLANTING MANIFESTO

After several meetings, 133 church leaders in Houston, TX, signed a church planting manifesto committing to work together to develop a strategy for church planting to reach all people in the city. Following is a copy of the manifesto.

#### Church Planting Manifesto

Whereas, the Bible teaches that God's plan for mankind is redemption through Jesus Christ (Eph. 1:4)

Whereas, Jesus came to seek and to save the lost

- *Jesus came to seek and to save the lost (Luke 19:10)*
- *Heaven rejoices over the salvation of every person (Luke 15)*

Whereas, Jesus established the church for the purpose of continuing his redemptive work in the world following his ascension

- *The work of Christ was the work of reconciliation (2 Cor. 5:19)*
- *The church as Jesus established it is the body of Christ intended to continue the work of Christ in the world (Matt. 16:18; 1 Cor. 12:27; Eph. 4:12)*
- *Prior to his ascension Jesus commanded his followers on several occasions to make disciples of all people (ethne) in the world (Matt. 28:18-20; Mark 16:15; Luke 24:46-47; John 20:21; Acts 1:8)*

Whereas, Jesus expected his kingdom to grow from its humble beginnings to encompass and include all people

- *It is the nature of the kingdom of God to grow (Matt. 13:31-32)*
- *It is the nature of the kingdom of God to encompass all people (ethne) (Matt. 13:47; Acts 1:8)*

Whereas, the early church set the example by sharing the gospel, establishing churches and making disciples of all people (ethne)

- *Peter and other disciples boldly shared the gospel with all people, crossing geographic, linguistic, ethnic and culture barriers to do so (this is the story of the early church in Acts)*
- *This practice is continued today through church planting movements around the world*

Whereas, we, an assembly of church leaders in Houston, on this nineteenth day of January, 2997, do acknowledge and affirm that

- *We believe the command of Jesus to make disciples of all people (ethne) is intended for the church today as much as it was intended for the church in the first century*
- *We recognize that while it is the nature of the kingdom of God to grow the population growth of the greater Houston area is increasing faster than the growth of the church, which means that the church is losing ground in the city daily, and this troubles us*
- *We believe a strategy of starting new churches is a primary way to reach those not yet Christians with the gospel and to help them become fully devoted disciples of Jesus*
- *We realize that no one way of doing church will reach all people (ethne)*
- *We believe every person should have ready access to a church that is biblically based, doctrinally sound and contextually appropriate to them*
- *We believe a cooperative, coordinated strategy of church planting that embraces different kinds of churches will be the most effective way to reach all the people of our city and maximize the resources available to the church*

Therefore, we, an assembly of church leaders in Houston on this nineteenth day of January, 2007, do sign this Manifesto in which we acknowledge our denominational and stylistic differences, but commit to working together to develop a strategy for church planting that will reach all the people (ethne) of our city.

### RECOMMENDED READING

Examples of reproducing systems by Neil Cole, church planter and author of several books, including *Organic Church* (<http://www.amazon.com/exec/obidos/tg/detail/-/078798129X>):

*TruthQuest* is a system for training emerging leaders in systematic theology. It requires a class size between four and eight and one facilitator. Students meet one Saturday a month for a year to be prepared to think theologically, but also to pass that education on to others. Available at <http://www.cmaresources.org>.

*Cultivating a Life for God* introduces Life Transformation Groups (LTGs), groups of two or three people who get together once a week for an hour, perhaps over a meal, for mutual accountability, to reflect on Scripture and to pray strategically for unbelieving friends. Available at <http://www.cmaresources.org>.



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*\* Unless otherwise noted, all Scripture is taken from the NIV translation.*