

Partnership-Ready Churches—Part 2

by Ellen Livingood

In last month's issue of *Postings*, (www.catalystservices.org/bm~doc/ptnshp-ready.pdf) we presented 10 characteristics of a partnership-ready church. This issue continues that topic with suggestions as to how to help a church prepare

for partnership and indicators for readiness for an additional partnership. We also interview a pastor and a missionary facilitator to get their perspective on church readiness.

Ways to Prepare a Church for Partnership

As a church leader, missionary, or agency mobilizer, you may assess a congregation by the list of partnership-readiness factors shared last time and determine that it doesn't pass the test. What if a church is not prepared to partner? What can be done to boost the partnering "temperature" of the church?

Here are some suggestions:

- **Pray for a new sense of vision for church leaders.** Ask God to specifically move in the heart of the pastor, elders, missions chair, or other leaders. Pray that He will supernaturally bring them into contact with people or situations that will open their eyes and their heart. Search your own heart to make sure you are not guilty of a judgmental spirit toward church leaders. Release the situation to God's control.
- **Don't give up if the pastor is not missions passionate.** Launching a lay-driven initiative that has the pastor's approval, if not his enthusiastic support, is more difficult but possible. Many pastors and church leaders are "converted" as they see the undeniable results and experience partnership excitement.
- **Seek to better understand the church's perspective on partnership.** Get out of your own skin and step back to look at your partnership proposal from the viewpoint of the pastor and other church leaders. What goals are they trying to achieve that would be advanced by a partnership such as you envision? What are their logical reasons to be hesitant? What would make a partnership "do-able" for them, considering all of the other demands on their time and energies? What support systems could you put in place that could increase the chances of their success in this type of endeavor?
- **Develop a clear, passionate presentation of the potential partnership.** You may be personally excited by the possibility of partnering with this church, but can you present the opportunity in a way that grabs the attention and stirs the hearts of others? Although it may feel awkward, practice presenting your ideas to a friend who will honestly critique your presentation.
- **Tell stories of success.** Many churches have little incentive to change because they haven't seen examples of exciting success stories. Collect great illustrations of what similar churches have done as they have taken on a global partnership. Don't have stories? Attend an ACMC conference (www.acmc.org) or an unreached people network meeting, or ask another mobilizer.
- **Take one or (better) several church leader on a vision-casting trip** to a region of the world where God is working and a church is involved in a significant partnership. Show them the possibilities.
- **Introduce leaders to a partnership advocate from another church.** Advocates are some of the most passionate people for missions involvement. Let them tell their story in the church—to the whole congregation, or the missions team, or the pastors and elders.
- **Challenge the missions team to launch one small, proactive project.** Invite them to consider what one thing they could do that would have a significant, strategic impact. Purposeful, successful, missions engagement is addictive!
- **Invite a young adults class or small group to brainstorm and test a new, hands-on initiative.** Ask them

what would be exciting for them, and design a project around their preferences.

- **Build on a current global relationship.** If the church is not ready for a full-blown partnership, begin to build some characteristics of a partnership into an existing global connection.
- **Gently point out to church leaders the limitations of their current missions approach.** Suggest they poll the congregation to evaluate missions interest. Study

records of missions giving over the past 10 years, adjusted for inflation. Look at the number of missionaries the church has fielded for mid- or long-term service. Could they do more?

- **Identify the church's untapped potential.** Get to know some of the gifts of individual church members. Share ideas of how God might use their expertise, experience, and connections in global initiatives.

When Is a Partnering Church Ready to Add Another Partnership?

While some churches pile on too many partnerships, others have the misguided impression that they can only pursue one. This is particularly true of congregations which have adopted an unreached people group. Encourage the church to consider adding another partnership if:

- The church is already supplying all of the resources the current partnership can absorb. If the congregation is no longer being stretched by the need for more investment, look for another challenge.
- You identify a number of skills, passions, or types of expertise lying dormant, not needed in your present partnership. For example, perhaps your current initiative doesn't need those with a heart for justice ministry or medical help. Why not look for another opportunity where these resources can be invested?
- Your church has one or more potential leaders capable of guiding another partnership effort and you have some



one with available time to train and mentor them.

- You have a stable leadership team in place for your current partnership and can start building another.
 - You recognize that your current partnership is within a year of completion. This is a good point at which to start moving toward the launch of another.
 - Progress stalls on your current initiative. Partnerships hit periods when for a variety of reasons the work slows. Perhaps a key facilitator is on home assignment, political pressure closes the field, security issues make it difficult to send teams, etc. It is important to not abandon the initiative when God has called you to persevere, but you may find this a God-given opportunity to launch another effort. Your new initiative may be short-term to fill the gap or you may find that by the time new doors open in your first initiative that your church has plenty of capacity to maintain both effectively.

Two Viewpoints on Preparing a Church for Partnership



**George Kohl, Senior Pastor
Belmont Street Baptist Church, Worcester, MA**

How did you prepare your congregation for a new approach to missions?

First I laid the biblical groundwork in messages. Then we also presented the pragmatic reasons. Short-term missions trips

have had a very positive impact here, even though we scattered them in different directions. So challenging our people to consider how much greater impact we could have if we focused our efforts was an easy sell.

Another factor we emphasized was the reality of "bleed-over blessing." We helped people understand that we were not getting rid of our missionary family but rather we were

launching a specific project that would have wide congregational involvement will the potential of spilling over in blessing for others around the globe.

How did you move leaders to readiness?

Our global outreach team had been frustrated that it was so hard to help the congregation capture a vision. Being introduced to the new approach of a strategic initiative gave them hope that they could have a greater impact on the entire church. We recognized that when our folks could get involved in depth in one concentrated effort, they would better understand concretely what missions is all about.

Another step was keeping our elders involved in the selection process. They received regular updates from me and from the global outreach team. They were impressed at how seriously the team was taking their task of identifying a potential focus.

Anything else?

We kept it before our people for prayer. We told them that we didn't want the choice to be a politically decided issue. It wasn't a matter of who had the strongest opinion or most clout. Rather we wanted the leading of the Lord and were asking them to pray about it. When we sent "spies to explore the land," we engaged the whole congregation in prayer.

**David Belch, missionary facilitator**

Coordinating a partnership between two American churches and two Venezuelan churches planting a new congregation in Tenerife, one of the Canary Islands (Spain).

What marks a church that is ready to engage in a complex partnership such as yours?

A willingness to serve the needs of their partners and the people to whom they are going, rather than just force-fitting their own program. Most of the churches that do this well have first learned to work together with other congregations on the local scene. They must be very flexible, too. Plan, yes, but then be willing to flex everywhere, to adapt to whatever comes up.

Communication is also key in this type of initiative. Church partners must commit the time to keep the flow of information going. Once an idea starts moving, each partner must keep it moving. If the church isn't committed to taking the time to respond in a timely way, they will get left behind.

How can a missionary help a church get ready to partner?

Everywhere we go, I encourage people to come, to send a team to help us. I start with a general invitation to whoever will listen—pastor, other leaders, etc. If there is some degree of interest, I talk about specific ways they could be involved.

Churches may think they have to be able to field a big team of 15 or 20 people, and that seems insurmountable. I try to help them see that sometimes two or three people are enough if they are strategically involved. We as missionaries must use creativity to see what a church could bring to the

table. Obviously we need to sense the leading of the Holy Spirit, then go after the churches and move them forward.

What do you find engages a pastor's heart?

I am a strong believer in churches spending the money to send someone from the pastoral team out to visit. When a church sends a short-term team, I encourage one of the pastors or church leaders to join them at the end of the team's visit and see what has been accomplished. Even in a short visit, they catch the excitement and build their interest.



Ellen Livingood, the head of Catalyst Services, is excited to see so many churches move to the point of being ready to partner effectively.

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