

URBAN/SUBURBAN PARTNERSHIPS

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September 2010

As we ponder the notion of partnering between the urban and suburban contexts, it is important to first determine the answer to at least two key questions:

- 1.) What does the centrality of the Gospel look like in each of our respective contexts?
And
- 2.) What does the centrality of the Gospel look like in a regional context?

In order to answer these questions honestly, contextually and strategically; we must first define a few things:

For the purpose of our ongoing discussions, we need to be sure that our respective Mission, Vision and Purpose statements are specific, clear and in synch with our present missional discussion; otherwise, there will be a lot of frustration and miscommunication.

ASSUMPTIONS as we pursue partnering:

- We are not necessarily talking about church planting; although churches may be a natural outcome of what we do together.
- We are not talking about bringing in outside people to do the work for us. We want to utilize the existing resources that God has placed at our disposal. This makes each of us (and our local church ministries) responsible for what happens. There may be times when we bring in outside “experts” or counselors; but this is to help us do our job more effectively.
- What we are talking about is a missional KINGDOM focus of “Reaching every man, woman and child (m, w, and c) in the Delaware Valley (5 million people) with repeated opportunities of hearing, seeing and touching the reality of the Gospel of Jesus Christ and then making a decision to accept or reject Christ as personal Lord and Savior.”

This requires that we do some reflecting on at least two levels –

- Micro level - What does God want for us as a church?
- Macro – What does God want for us as a church in relation to the greater Body of Christ in our region and our world?

What would it look like if God did what He wanted in our midst?

This kind of reflection will help clarify our purpose, calling, core values and help define with whom we partner and what we do in and through partnering. Perhaps a more common biblical word might be “co-labor.” Working together for a common

purpose or ultimate goal, namely that we reach every man, woman and child in our defined geographic area with repeated opportunities to hear, see and touch the reality of the Gospel of Jesus and to accept or reject Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior (Matt 28-18-20).

Micro level – what does God want for each of our church’s regarding our geographic area of accountability (circle of accountability) in reaching every m, w, and c... in our community. Who are the other “players”? With whom can we cooperate? What are the resources already available that we can utilize? What can we offer to others to reach every man, woman... in our immediate geography?

Macro level – what God wants for the Delaware Valley – 5 million people? Key players? With whom can we cooperate? What are the resources already available that we can utilize? What can we offer to others to reach every man, woman... in our region?

If our defined geographic area is bigger than any one church, denomination or organization can accomplish alone, then this will force us outside of ourselves to work together with the greater Body of Christ in order to accomplish what God desires. If our vision is “small” enough for us to accomplish alone, then we will obviously see no need to partner or co-labor with others. For this reason we ask the question... “What does God wants?”

Some define partnership as:

Looking for someone who will compliment me. Someone who has those gifts that I don't have which when combined with my gifts will make the task/journey/etc. easier and more likely to succeed.

I would agree with this statement perhaps on a local church level. However, honestly, I even struggle with that – the reason being – if we are KINGDOM focused, we will be looking for ways to mutually leverage our resources for the greater good and not simply for my own good. Case and point, how many people are in a 5 mile radius of our church? Can we reach every m, w and c with the gospel on our own? The answer is obviously no!

When we are talking about a region, the need for partnerships is even more pronounced as we contemplate the monumental task of reaching 5 million people with repeated opportunities of hearing the Gospel and accepting or rejecting Jesus Christ as personal Lord Savior.

We also need to look for others who are in the context that we want to reach and are gifted and equipped to do so. Ultimately, partnering would have mutual benefit for both the urban and suburban entities. Reaching 5 million people requires leveraging all of Christ’s resources in our region.

What might partnering look like at a regional level?

I believe that it would be more of a movement of God’s people sharing resources – urban – personnel who are in the City, who understand the culture and have

influence over their geographic context serving in the “trenches” and willing to sacrifice themselves for the KINGDOM. And suburban... – with a leadership that sees the bigger picture. We need many partners/co-laborers (both urban and suburban).

So in essence, “partnering” to me, means working together with the Body of Christ to accomplish together what we could never do alone. More specifically, reaching every man, woman and child... in the Delaware Valley - well over 5 million people. Church planting, church revitalization, soup kitchens, social services, etc... are all part of reaching our region in a holistic manner with the Gospel. This is why we need partnership. Each one bringing what he/she has for the common good – the Gospel, demonstrating the love of God one for another as we serve those in need of a Savior.

I believe that God is looking for His people to stand together for Kingdom principles – so that the world might know that the Father sent Jesus.

John 17:23 I in them and You in Me, that they may be perfected in unity, so that the world may know that You sent Me, and loved them, even as You have loved Me.
Eph 4:3 being diligent to preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.
Col 3:14 Beyond all these things put on love, which is the perfect bond of unity.

Biblically speaking, this synergistic approach to ministry has a specific purpose: ...that the world might see the love of God’s people one for another (John 13)... To the end that those who are appointed to eternal life might believe and be saved (Acts 13:48 When the Gentiles heard this, they began rejoicing and glorifying the word of the Lord; and as many as had been appointed to eternal life believed).

With this Biblical backdrop, I have a few observations regarding strategic KINGDOM partnerships. These are simply my thoughts right or wrong. First, I will state my perceptions and observations based on what I have seen and experienced both in the USA and overseas in these kinds of missional discussions. I will then ask few more questions.

- 1.) Even though no expectations may be stated, by anyone, there are always unstated expectations on the part of all participants.
- 2.) As is most often the case, the urban context suffers from lack of resources – both financial and professional/technical capital, etc.
- 3.) The suburban church is often cautious regarding how and where it shares its resources and rightly so. At the same time, control cannot be an issue on either side once resources are released. Again this goes back to why COS exists and its sense of mission in the region.
- 4.) Partnering/co-laboring based on relationship and trust is essential. This takes time.
- 5.) In the case where any of the key leadership is not 100% behind the biblical assumption/strategy that we need reach every man, woman and child with the gospel, there will be foundational weakness in developing

and implementing a holistic plan of reaching our circle of accountability. This begs the question: How can this person(s) be brought on board?

- 6.) When doctrine becomes the main driving force behind partnership/cooperation (i.e. reformed, dispensational, Pentecostal, etc...) we are in danger of ostracizing part of the Body of Christ and being divisive in our view of the Gospel. How important is "doctrinal purity"?
- 7.) I suppose this begs another question: What are our non-negotiables? Even before we each defined our respective Mission, Vision and Purpose statements, we needed to clarify our core values – the non-negotiables that clearly define us and guide who we are and to what we are committed. What are the criteria that must be true in terms of values if we will be involved with others at a partnering/co-laboring level?

Even if your church has gone through the process of establishing core values etc... The question is how does a more intentional commitment to those values, etc... work itself out in practice? As I use to say to the brethren in Florence, Italy: "Michelangelo had a very specific idea in mind when he sculptured the statue of David? What do you want to see as a result of your efforts in ministry." If we don't have a specific idea in mind from the start, how can we know if we are on the right track and/or if our efforts have had the desired effect?

- 8.) Expectations from the side of the urban context include what the suburban church has to offer in terms of funding, personnel and expertise in – entrepreneurship, legal counsel, influence and hands on involvement. Giving away our resources for the sake of the Kingdom. This can be a source of real tension, if we are not clear on our purpose and with whom we work and why.
- 9.) What will the suburban church "receive" in a partnership/co-laboring relationship? Initially, being blessed, challenged and used by God in a ministry context that needs what members of your church have to offer. The level of involvement will be determined based by the answers to questions found in # 7.

Obviously, much more discussion is needed as we work towards a common vision and if your local church is serious about partnership for the cause of the KINGDOM, you will make the time to do so.

So, I ask "what is our response?" "What do we do with what God has put before us?" Do we go it alone, or do we work synergistically with brothers and sisters in Christ to realize a vision far greater than ourselves that calls, yea, demands us (John 13; 17) to stand together with others of like heart and mind for the Gospel and for the KINGDOM!?

As a good friend once said, the challenge is in the details - not in the mandate.

Let's keep praying, dialoguing and serving as we move forward together in this vital KINGDOM work.

Strategy –
Suburban and urban –

Identify at least three key ministries in the urban context with which we can partner

Identify at least three key ministries in the suburban context with which we can partner.

How do we do it?

What has God called us to do?

Reach every man, woman and child with repeated opportunities to see, hear and touch the gospel.

Comprehensive needs of our community:

Social
Economic
Spiritual