

# **Church Networking Institute**

Proposal/Plan

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**Mission Statement:**

To facilitate dynamic, working local church outreach partnerships throughout the San Gabriel Valley in order to reconcile the Church and transform the communities in the San Gabriel Valley.

**Vision Statement:**

That local San Gabriel Valley churches reconcile differences through dynamic partnering to serve social community needs locally.

- Every local church in the San Gabriel Valley partnered in outreach ministry with at least one church within a 3 mile radius.
- Every local church partnership is resourced to address the unique and specific local community need.
- Every local social institution (ex. City government, schools, service organizations, police, fire, etc.) able to communicate and rely on informal or formal assistance from local churches to address community needs.
- Every local church in the San Gabriel Valley able to exist as a united Body of Christ.
- The San Gabriel Valley Network sets a model for church reconciliation throughout Southern California.

**Values:**

- Unity of the Body of Christ
  - Mutual respect and appreciation for diverse theological traditions.
  - Open, active, and constructive dialogue.
  - Each congregation is equally important regardless of size, wealth or ministry experience.
- Love God and neighbor reciprocally.
  - All efforts to glorify God.
  - Active fostering of a community of prayer.
  - All social outreach is evangelical.
- Ministry must be comprehensive.
  - Adequately locate and address individual and systemic injustices.
  - Advocacy for reconciliation for the poor, oppressed and marginalized.
- Frugal efficiency of resources.

**Summary:***Activities:*

- Community Needs Assessments
- Broker Church Partnerships
- Empower Developing Networks

*Operational Necessities:*

- 2 Full-Time Staff Workers
- Non-Profit Status
- \$70,000 Operating Budget
  - Salary – 2 full-time staff
  - Health Insurance
  - Information Systems
  - Institute Materials

## **Introduction:**

The divisive nature of the Church is in essence antevangelism. The antithesis of evangelism lies not in a stagnant nature, which renders a motionless Church, but in its active, dynamic witness that results in opposing the first classical mark of the Church – oneness. This mark, found in the Apostles Creed, searches for unity, even in the face of inconsistency within the Church. The lack of unity portrayed to the church and the unchurched alike is in direct opposition to the Gospel.

Not only does disunity preach ante-Gospel, but it distracts churches from recognizing and providing for the local needs of the community. This is a huge disaster, and highly contrary to the essence of the Church. The Church is to care for its local community, those within its walls and without. Due to its divisive nature, resources in effect get consumed in warring with other churches rather than serving the community.

Theological unity is a nearly impossible task, and though important for the Church's continuance and survival, the method of ecumenism through theological synthesis has not been effective. Another approach is necessary so that the Church can be unified and can address local needs adequately, in working partnership with other local churches.

The necessary approach is partnership through local ministry. Local churches must band together around community needs, not only to create unity but to remain locally relevant. Unity and relevance are imperatives for local evangelism. Churches within a similar area, be it zip-code or block radius, typically encompass a similar demographic and residents are effected by similar concerns. No matter what the denomination of the churches, neighbors will inevitably be unified by their concerns and local churches must address these concerns in order to reach their community. Local churches then must be unified around similar concerns.

It is around this unity of concern that the church as “One” can be effective and reach their community for the Gospel. Through addressing these concerns, churches can pool resources, be they financial, capital or human resources and transform their community. The Church already has two central components to outreach – the great commission and the Holy Spirit. These two facets of the Church, gifts to extend and embrace locally, make churches the most effective bodies to effect local change.

This is not rhetoric for the social gospel, in which the Church attempts to usher in the kingdom, rather the kingdom is now and not yet – instituted by God alone. The Church has long stepped aside and allowed government and other institutions to take local authority. To be sure, there does exist a separation between church and state in America, however there is rarely discouragement upon churches for addressing local needs. The Church need not compete for this authority, but embrace and engage its community, positively effecting and allowing for the Holy Spirit to transform the local community. The Church may not be the legal authority, but it does reside in the power and authority of God to preach the message of hope and reconciliation and to act in positive outreach.

The Church in Acts engaged locally in evangelism. It did so, buttressing the message of hope with acts of hope. This operation seeks to reorder the Church to mimic the Acts model contextually – in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. The operation is to mobilize local churches to actively partner in Spirit and in resources to dynamically address the issues concerning their local community, thus unifying the Church and providing a powerful witness of the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

Often pastors and parishioners do not have the time to do the footwork of building strategic local partnerships, let alone do community needs assessments. This operation sees its function as doing the research for assessing community needs, surveying local churches and their resources and fostering dynamic partnerships to address these local needs in the San Gabriel Valley. To do this adequately and timely, the operation will require two full-time workers to assess needs, develop partnerships and provide assistance to empowering churches to address the needs.

## **Activities:**

### *Needs Assessment:*

A community needs assessment is a vital genesis to building a local network. The local community's needs drive the purpose and relationships of local churches within a network. Without specific target needs, the network loses relevance quickly and with it the opportunity to share the Gospel effectively. One of the major functions of the institute is to serve as an advisor for local churches to provide ministry and outreach to specific community needs.

Needs assessment begins by compiling notes from a series of interviews conducted with a diverse group that hold large stake within a community. These groups can include local government, local schools, local para-church ministries, church leaders, local law enforcement, among others. Questions addressed include area demographics, current resources in place and opportunities for local churches to spear-head or get involved in community development and transformation.

Upon the compilation of notes, the next step is to return to local churches explaining the assessment and finding partnerships that the local church can engage in the development and transformation of the needs. To make this transition organic, local churches must seek out existing resources, most promisingly through church partnerships.

Recognizing that churches can only offer what each has, addressing the needs with limited resources may take creative adjustments and trajectories. Partnerships may see churches spearheading unique local ministries, while sending interested members to assist partner churches in other ministries. Regardless, churches historically have an impressive record to mobilize dynamic, effective ministries with little resources.

### *Church Partnership Brokering:*

After addressing community needs with local churches, the object of the network is to broker partnerships with churches engaged in similar ministries. The most prominent partnerships are built in the act of personal interaction, so after assessing community needs and the resource bases of local churches, the next step requires introducing local church leaders and propose a partnership to address specific needs.

Setting up meetings whereby local church leaders can meet and explore possibilities. The institute representative serves as a catalyst for the church leaders, but is willing to step back and break away upon positive working interaction between leaders.

After partnerships and networks are in place, institute representatives switch from catalyst to encourager. Continuing to provide space for partnership and creativity, the representative comes in only as an assistant to the network, be it to broker other leaders into the network or to seek out desired resources. One primary function of this are area network bi-annual gatherings and brainstorm sessions and reassessment periods.

### *Empowering Ministry:*

As mentioned above, the institute representative becomes a network Barnabas, encouraging and aiding networks in their local ministry. Functions in this role are wide and varied, but can take on many tasks – both formal and informal.

One formal, regular portion of empowerment is to facilitate bi-annual gatherings of networks and extended networks (network groups of larger areas). In these gatherings the representative provides sessions to brainstorm and assess the effect of the current ministry and the shape of it to come for each network. These gatherings also create space for resource advice, such as authorities speaking on specific ministries or ministry funding. These gatherings also serve to extend to build partnerships in the local community outside of the church network, like school leaders or government leaders.

A representative also can do the footwork to research certain points of interest for various networks. This can be networking ministry leaders to give council or locating grants for different

projects.

The empowering tasks vary greatly based on network need, but provide positive services and direction to empower networks. The hope of the institute is to phase out its necessity in this area, by providing avenues for resources and contacts to continually assist each network uniquely.

### **Operational Necessities:**

#### *Staff:*

The institute would be served best with two full-time employees working a 40 hour work week. Each employee would be a regional representative, one strategically in Pasadena and the other based in Azusa. Each staff would do a community needs assessment by zip code or block radius, broker partnerships and seek out resources to empower the active network. Hours would be flexible based on interviews and network meetings.

#### *Resources:*

Networking works best on a relational level. To effectively establish healthy, dynamic networks, the representative will spend nearly 50% of the time meeting with potential network candidates or interviewing for needs assessments. Since this is the case, it is likely the representative could spend the remaining time working from home. Adequate representative resources would require Internet capabilities, mobile phone services and printing capabilities. With these in place, location need not be much of a factor.

To foster bi-annual gatherings, places of meeting would be necessary. The desire would be to utilize the auditorium or parish hall of a church already connected in the ministry. This would have to be set up with the specific community, but requires little outside assistance.

#### *Funding:*

Since a representative can work from home, little overhead expenses would be needed. Two full-time employees at a salary of \$26,000 per year and the coverage of communication abilities, estimated at \$1000 per year. Health insurance coverage includes an estimated \$6,000 per year per representative, leaving the total representative cost to be \$33,000. An operations budget for printing capabilities, software capabilities and gathering hospitality requires an estimated \$4000 per year. Total operating expenses estimates to \$70,000 per year.

A crucial factor in the success of the institute and donor relations requires non-profit status or the acceptance of a non-profit organization to include the institute in non-profit status. Possible opportunities, benefiting both the institute and the organization are Fuller Theological Seminary or Azusa Pacific University. Both schools are integral components to the Church within San Gabriel Valley. If neither school agrees, opportunities under a church or para-church organization will be sought out.

*First Quarter Time-line:*

Month 1

- Develop institutional regulations and standards
- Target genesis areas
- Begin needs assessments in genesis areas

Month 2

- Report needs in genesis areas
- Begin to seek out church resources
- Begin to foster local church partnerships

Month 3

- Establish first networks
- Seek out resources to empower network
- Plan first network gathering