



**A** PATHWAY TO PARTNERSHIP



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Are you curious about how your church can be part of a larger mission? Do you need help for your elder team and don't know where to turn? Are you eager to plant a church but don't know how to go about it? Do you feel like no one cares when you're ready to resign? Have you heard of a network of churches that provides love, help, and collaboration? Are you looking for a way to create a partnership that is both advantageous and biblical?

If you answered yes to any of these questions, this article is for you. Here are five steps to help pastors and elders make partnership a priority and reap the benefits of connection, collaboration, and fruitfulness.

## STEP ONE: CULTIVATE THE CONVICTION

Are you convinced that the mission of the Church can only be accomplished through churches partnering with one another?

Partnership is a theological issue, and the cornerstone of any church's mission is the Great Commission. To succeed, pastors must have a personal conviction—backed by scripture—that partnership is necessary. Before you go any further, pray and ensure that you believe partnership is not only the answer to the challenges you are facing but a scriptural mandate as well.

### Examples and Mandates

- The Great Commission: “All nations” (Matt 28: 19) and “to the end of the age” (Matt. 28: 20).
- The partnership between local churches and extra-local ministries (Eph. 4:11-13).
- Paul's partnership with the Philippians church: “your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now” (Phil. 1: 5).
- Paul worked to connect churches through communication and affection: “All the churches send greetings” (Rom. 16:16).
- Paul's work to connect churches to collect the Jerusalem offering: (Rom. 15:26; 1 Cor. 16:1-4; 2 Cor. 8:1-5; 9:6-15).
- Paul was sent from churches & received by churches (Acts 13: 1-3; 14: 24-28; 15: 2-3; 22; 30; 18: 18-24; 19: 21; 20: 1-6; 21: 1-16).
- Paul would encourage churches with each other's example (2 Cor 8:1-5; 1Thes 1:6-8).
- Paul would exhort churches to give resources to extra-local ministry for mission (Rom. 16: 1-2; Philippians 2:19-25; 4:14-16).
- Paul would work with churches to develop & release co-workers (Acts 11:22-26, 13:1-3, 15:40, 16:3-5; 1 Cor:16:17-18; Rom.16:3-4; Phil.2:25; Col. 1:7,4:12-13; 2 Tim 4:11).
- John Calvin's network of pastors with whom he shared life: “Calvin was but one member of a company of Pastors and he was willing to submit to its authority and judgement. Calvin's Company of Pastors was never Calvin's per se.”[i]

Pastor, is this what you truly want to partner? Are you convinced you need the help of men who share the same burdens; who do what you do? Has it become a conviction for which you are willing to advocate? If so, let's talk about our next step.

## STEP TWO: CONNECT THE ELDERS

As a leader within your church, it is your responsibility to ensure that your elders understands and values the importance of partnerships in mission. To help your elders understand this, it is important to open your Bible together and discuss the doctrine of partnerships, the role of collaboration, renewal dynamics and other important material.

The biblical doctrine of partnership is an essential part of a church's mission and can provide a great deal of help to a church's staff, elders, and lead pastors. Understanding and celebrating partnership can help a church gain catalytic influence and beneficial accountability.

- Study scripture as an elder team to understand the importance of partnerships and the role of the local church (e.g. Ecclesiastes 4:9-10, Psalm 133).
- Read books on the topic of partnerships, such as *The Plurality Principle* and *Stronger Together: 7 Partnership Virtues and the Vices that Subvert Them*.
- Create space for unhurried conversation to discuss and write down ideas about partnerships.
- Share convictions about partnerships with the elders, helping them to see the beauty and magnificence behind God's plan of uniting churches for mission.
- Invite leaders of different networks to speak to your elders about what they do and answer questions.

Churches connecting and welcoming new influences can bring catalytic influence and accountability for your elders. Pastor, you can catalyze this by studying the biblical doctrine of partnership as an elder team, expressing your own convictions, and considering the benefits of interdependence.

## STEP THREE: CONSIDER THE OPTIONS

As church leaders consider the various networks available to them, it is important to identify and locate themselves within two tensions: the alignment continuum and the structure continuum. By plotting their partnership on these two continuums, church leaders can find the most suitable network for their church, which will help them to clarify their church's identity, make clearer decisions, and find compatible future partners.

It is essential for church leaders to understand and determine where their church falls on the alignment and structure continuums in order to find a network that will best support their church's mission and identity. Knowing the differences between a centralized and decentralized network and a theology-centered and mission-centered church will help church leaders make informed decisions on how best to serve their church and the larger church body.

- Download the alignment and structure continuum tools at [gccollective.org](http://gccollective.org) and use them to discover where your church falls on both continuums.
- Consider the implications of a theology-centered or mission-centered church.
- Decide if a centralized or decentralized network is best for your church.
- Use scripture to guide your decision-making (e.g. Romans 12:4-5; Ephesians 4:11-16; 1 Corinthians 12:12-31; Matthew 28:19-20).

Once you use the tools to plot your church on these two continuums, it will help you to clarify your church's identity, make clearer decisions, and find future partners that are compatible with the most suitable network.

### **Consult your Budget**

As your convictions on church partnerships are strengthened, you should also ponder how these priorities would affect your budget. Look at the financial commitment that comes with partnership and consider the ways you can help your church see the value of joining with other churches. Think about specific ways you can inspire the church to see the blessing of interdependence; help them to understand how the partnership will help them with church planting, leadership development, elder training, and global missions.

Many churches start with folding their financial commitment into their missions budget. The key is intentionality. Giving, and then reporting back to the church on how their giving bears fruit, assigns a proper priority to the partnership and joins hearts to the broader gospel work happening through your giving.

## STEP FOUR: COMMUNICATION WITH YOUR CHURCH

The gospel of Jesus Christ is infinitely precious and intrinsically valuable, and God has ordained a specific means for the gospel to be impressed upon others. Similarly, church interdependence is also intrinsically valuable for all churches, but its truth and desirability is not immediately self-evident. As the pastor, it is your responsibility to clarify and celebrate the biblical value of partnership with your church members and to help them understand why partnering with other churches is essential.

- **Sow from the pulpit:** Take the material you have studied and discussed as elders and plot a course. What ideas surfaced in the discussion that seemed essential to pass along? Maybe there is a series you can deliver on the book of Acts or the epistle to the Philippians that allows you to address partnership from your exposition.
- **Share your journey:** Talk to the church about the elder's study and what you affirmed together as a team. Explain why you think a broader affiliation might serve the church, the elders and you.
- **Explain the scripture:** Share what the Bible teaches, and why partnering with other churches is important. Make sure to cite specific scripture references such as Romans 10:14.
- **Experience the network:** Circulate information, invite a network representative to present the network before the church, or create a Q & A time after a service.
- **Own the responsibility:** Own the responsibility to clarify and celebrate the biblical value of partnership to the church.

Through the leadership of the pastor and the study of the elders, churches can come to understand the value of partnering with other churches and learn how to navigate the process. The pastor has a responsibility to explain the biblical value of partnership and provide the church with an experience of the network. Together, these will help the church body understand and embrace the power of church interdependence.

## STEP FIVE: COMMIT TO RECIPROCITY

Reciprocity is a key component of any successful relationship, including those within church networks. Maturity fuels reciprocity, which requires a commitment of both time and resources. Churches should look to the example of the Philippians, who showed they were maturing in their partnership with Paul by their commitment to giving and receiving (Philippians 2:19-30, 4:14-18). By following their example, churches can help to ensure a healthy, meaningful network.

- Pray for the missions and ministries of other churches in the network
- Welcome network leaders with hospitality
- Develop and send out missional leaders
- Give joyfully and according to the network contract
- Plan to attend network events

Reciprocity is a key component of any successful relationship, and is no exception when it comes to church networks. As we strive to build strong, meaningful networks, we must look to the example of the Philippians, who exemplified a commitment to giving and receiving in their partnership with Paul. By following their example, churches can ensure a healthy, successful network.



# TAKE THE NEXT STEP

Pastor, you can help your elders and church make “partnership” a higher priority. By following these steps, pastors can join a movement that is quickly spreading throughout the world and making a difference in mission clarity and church vitality. Partnership is not about growing a ministry or building a brand, but rather God wants us to come together to harness resources for greater kingdom impact. When churches come together, the fruit of ministry abounds and leaders can thrive. Local churches are better together, smarter together, and stronger together.