TRANSITIONING BARDSTOWN CHRISTIAN

FELLOWSHIP, BARDSTOWN, KENTUCKY

INTO A CHURCH PLANTING NETWORK

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A Project

Presented to

the Faculty of

The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary

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In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Ministry

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by

Matthew Spandler-Davison

May 2015

APPROVAL SHEET

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Matthew Bjorn Spandler-Davison

Read and Approved by:

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Date_____

To Tracy,

my partner in life and in the gospel,

my Mother who introduced me to the Lord,

and to the members of

Bardstown Christian Fellowship—

your love, prayers, and support

have made this journey a joy.

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PREFACE

The journey of Bardstown Christian Fellowship is more than a decade long. This project has proven to be far more than an event in the life of a church, but a defining moment for this community of believers in central Kentucky. Our church has been transformed by it. More than an academic exercise, this project charts a transition in the life of our church and the principles that led us to it. I am forever indebted to the elders and members of Bardstown Christian Fellowship. Their love, support, prayers and vision have made being their pastor a joy.

I moved to Bardstown, Kentucky, in 2003 in order to pursue studies at The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary. It was not my intention to remain here; my goal was always to return to my native Scotland as a church planter. However, in the providence of God, and quite unplanned, a small group bible study developed into a new church in a community which lacked a healthy Gospel centered church at the time. Church planting has been a long and at times very difficult process for me, but I praise God for the fruit of it, as it is a delight to worship with and serve alongside this band of believers.

Joining me in this season has been my incredibly patient and supportive wife, Tracy. Being a native of Alabama, married to a Scotsman and establishing our family in Kentucky would be enough for most to bear. Planting a church and leading that church through the process of planting again could well have been burden too far. Instead, Tracy has been my constant friend, faithful prayer partner, and most important encourager. She too has come to cherish and treasure what is Bardstown Christian Fellowship. We both

recognize this church, and our role in it, as a wonderful act of God's loving-kindness toward us.

<div align="right">Matthew B. Spandler-Davison</div>

Louisville, Kentucky

May 2015

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

The purpose for this project was to lead Bardstown Christian Fellowship through the process of becoming two churches that share resources and property as a church-planting network. This purpose has been carried out through the planting of Grace Fellowship Church and Redeemer Fellowship Church.

Goals

The intent of this ministry project was to complete five goals. The first goal was to create a network leadership team. As Bardstown Christian Fellowship becomes two new churches, a network leadership team has been developed in order to provide direction and oversight to the network's operations and activities. The team includes a Network Director, an Administrative Director, an Activities Director, and a Missions Director. As the Network is developed, those who are appointed to these positions will meet as a team with the intent of providing leadership to the activities of the network. During the project period this team was established.

The second goal was to implement an administrative plan for the network. As the churches that form the Bardstown Christian Fellowship Network will be sharing property and resources, it will be necessary to begin to develop policies and protocols for the operations of the network. The Network Leadership Team worked together to develop and implement these policies, including but not limited to policies related to facility use, financial protocols, staff relations and other areas as deemed necessary by the team.

The third goal is the development of objectives for the Bardstown Christian Fellowship Network. These objectives relate to the network's church planting, global missions, and church development activities. A team has been formed to develop and communicate these goals to the members of the individual churches. The end result has been the establishment of long term objectives of the Bardstown Christian Fellowship Network that can begin to be implemented immediately by the leadership team and member churches.

The fourth goal is for the members of the Bardstown Christian Fellowship churches to understand and appreciate the biblical principles of partnership and cooperation between churches. In order to accomplish this goal resources have been developed and presented that demonstrate to the members the biblical principle of partnership and cooperation upon which the network is being built, in order that the vision and strategy of Bardstown Christian Fellowship receives the ongoing support of the members of BCF churches.

Finally, the fifth goal of this project was to develop personal skills in the area of leadership and coaching. As I assume the role of Director of the Bardstown Christian Fellowship Network of Churches I have sought to grow in my ability to train, mentor, shepherd and identify leaders.

Ministry Context

Bardstown Christian Fellowship is situated in Bardstown, Kentucky, a town located within an hour of four urban centers: Louisville, Lexington, Frankfort, and Elizabethtown. Most people that currently attend Bardstown Christian Fellowship drive within ten minutes to get to church. According to the research data compiled by the North American Mission Board (NAMB),[1] there are 17,020 people living within a ten-

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[1]"Demographic Report of Bardstown, KY" (Alpharetta, GA: North American Mission Board, 2012).

minute drive from the church building. This population has increased by 1.9 percent every year over the past decade. The rate of growth that the area has seen is higher than the state average. Nelson County, of which Bardstown is the County seat, has a population of 43,437.[2] The county population has increased from 37,477 ten years ago.

Over half of the population living within a ten minute drive of the church building is under the age of thirty-four, with the largest single age group being those under the age of four. Those under the age of eighteen make up 29.5 percent of the population. This suggests that Bardstown has a growing population that is predominantly made up of young families with children.

The data provided by NAMB also indicates that a significant number of households in Bardstown are comprised of two parents and their children. A large section of those households are made up of single parent households. Only 42 percent of family households are made up of a married couple with only their own children. It is also notable that 36 percent of residents in Bardstown rent their homes. The median household income is $37,000 per year. The largest single group of households, 21 percent, earns less than $15,000 a year. A significant population within Bardstown is low income, living in rental accommodation, with children in the home.

Bardstown has a diverse spiritual tradition. The first Catholic diocese west of the Appalachians was the Diocese of Bardstown that at the time of its settlement, in 1808, incorporated most of Kentucky, Tennessee, Illinois, Michigan, Indiana and Ohio. Bishop Flaget was appointed as the first Bishop of the Diocese of Bardstown and sat at the St. Joseph's proto-Cathedral in Bardstown. This Catholic heritage has left a mark upon Bardstown and the surrounding counties. The Sisters of Charity and Catholic Monks both have active communities around Bardstown. According to the Glenmary

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[2]U.S. Religious Census, 2010, accessed April 30, 2012, http://www.thearda.com/rcms2010 /rcms2010.asp?U=21179&T=county&S=Name&Y=2000&CH=ON.

Research Center study of religion in America conducted in 2010, there are 10,007 Catholic adherents in Nelson County.[3] This is down from 12,516 adherents recorded in the U.S. Religious Census conducted in 2000. Catholics in Nelson County still represent almost half of the religious adherents in the county.

One of the earliest associations of Baptists was also founded in the area. The Salem Baptist Association was founded in 1785 and included four of the first Baptist churches in Kentucky. However, the Baptist churches in and around Bardstown did not grow as fast as they did in other parts of Kentucky. Today there are eight Southern Baptist churches within a ten-minute drive from Bardstown Christian Fellowship. According to the U.S. Religious Census in the year 2010 there were 7,965 Southern Baptists in Nelson County, which represents 18 percent of the population. In 1990, the same survey showed that 24 percent of the population considered themselves to be Southern Baptist. This suggests that while the population has grown the number of evangelicals in the county has not managed to keep up with that growth rate. The Annual Report of the Kentucky Baptist Convention shows that on any given Sunday, 1,629 of those who claim to be Southern Baptist are in attendance at a Southern Baptist Church in Bardstown.[4] This suggests that less than one in ten people in Bardstown are actively attending a Southern Baptist church.

Congregation Profile

In September of 2002, I began an internship at Capitol Hill Baptist Church in Washington, D.C. I had been serving as a youth minister in Aberdeen, Scotland, prior to that. I moved to Louisville, Kentucky, to pursue a degree at The Southern Baptist

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[3]U.S. Religious Census, 2010, accessed April 30, 2012, http://www.thearda.com/rcms2010/rcms2010.asp?U=21179&T=county&S=Name&Y=2000&CH=ON.

[4]"Kentucky Baptist Convention Annual Report, 2011" (Louisville: Kentucky Baptist Convention, 2012).

Theological Seminary in January of 2003. After purchasing a home in Bardstown, Kentucky, I began to serve in youth ministry at a Baptist church in Bardstown. However, after a year at that church I felt convicted to leave because of the moderate theology of the leadership and open divisions between members following the resignation of their pastor. In May of 2004, the members of Capitol Hill Baptist Church voted to support me as a church planter with the goal of planting a church in Bardstown, Kentucky. After living there for eighteen months, I was burdened by the fact that there was no healthy church in the area at that time. I shared this burden with my mentor, Mark Dever, the pastor of Capitol Hill Baptist Church. I sensed the Lord leading me to begin a church in the area. A small group of six families began to meet on Tuesday nights for a Bible study. This group constituted itself as Bardstown Christian Fellowship (BCF) in July 2004. The members of BCF appointed three elders to oversee the work of the church.

Bardstown Christian Fellowship is an elder led church. At the start of this project there were six elders. Two of the elders were on staff; I was the Lead Pastor, and Brad Woods, the Associate Pastor. Expositional preaching, biblical church leadership, meaningful church membership, the practice of corrective church discipline, and a biblical understanding of conversion are all marks of the church. The public worship gathering is contemporary in style.

The church experienced a slow but steady growth over the first five years. After constituting, BCF began to meet for worship at the Bardstown Civic Center and had an average of forty in attendance throughout the first year. After being asked to leave the Civic Center due to scheduling conflicts, the group took out a lease on a storefront property in downtown Bardstown. With modifications, this property was eventually able to accommodate one hundred in worship.

In 2006 the church suffered a setback when a group of 10 members left to start a new church at another part of the county. The group left with the blessing of the elders who supported their vision to see a gospel preaching church established in their part of

Nelson County, but it was not formally commissioned by BCF. This group established a church that became known as Highway Church, but after less than a year of meeting the person who was leading the group moved out of town very abruptly. At this point the BCF elders made a decision to try to support the fledgling church plant (which at this stage had fewer than 8 in the group but was renting a house for meetings) by sending a young member of our church to work with them as a church planter. However, after limited success, it was decided in 2008 to fold Highway Church and to incorporate their members back into Bardstown Christian Fellowship.

In the meantime Bardstown Christian Fellowship was experiencing slow growth at its downtown location. By the end of 2008 the church had grown to only 50 members and around 70 in worship. The group had a great sense of unity and vision. Every year many were sent overseas on mission as the church developed partnerships in Nicaragua and Scotland. The church was also engaged in local evangelism with over a thousand attending an annual Easter egg hunt. Young couples that were new to Bardstown and who had young children were the group most likely to attend and join BCF.

In 2009, it was decided to leave the downtown property and to move worship services to the Old Kentucky Home Middle School. This decision was reached for a number of reasons. The downtown facility had limited parking and was not easy to find. It was limited to 100 in attendance, and proved unsuitable for a growing children's ministry. For one year the church met at the middle school and experienced immediate growth upon making the move. Each week, around 80 would attend worship services. Up to this point BCF was organized into Home Groups in which members studied the Scriptures together, ate a meal with another, and ministered to each other's needs. The church made a strategic decision at this time to change the focus of the Home Groups from small group Bible studies to Missional Community Groups. The church stopped doing church-wide evangelistic events and instead encouraged each Community Group to

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adopt a mission or an outreach project. Every member was assigned to a group, and every group was tasked with providing care to its members and opportunities for evangelism.

In December 2010, the elders of Connection Community Church approached the elders of BCF to consider a merger. Connection Church was a church plant in Bardstown that met on Sunday nights in a rented facility. Their pastor met with the BCF elders to share that he could no longer continue to lead the group, he had grown discouraged by the lack of growth they had experienced over their two years of existence, and he felt the best option for this church would be to merge with BCF. Our elders considered how we could come alongside Connection Church in order to encourage them and perhaps support them financially in order to keep them viable. However, after the sudden departure of their pastor, Connection Church made the difficult decision to merge with Bardstown Christian Fellowship. Fifteen members of Connection Church joined Bardstown Christian Fellowship in January of 2011.

At the beginning of this project period Bardstown Christian Fellowship was a church of 80 members and an average worship attendance of 130. The church was organized into seven Community Groups that met throughout the week. Each member was assigned to a group. These groups were fundamental to the life of the church as they provided both care to the members and outreach within the community. The church gathered for worship on a Sunday morning in its current facility on Pennebaker Avenue in Bardstown. This is a 10,000 square foot building that has a seating capacity for two hundred plus five classrooms for children. The church purchased this property in 2010 after meeting at the middle school for a year.

After existing as a church for seven years, the elders of BCF made a recommendation to the members in October of 2011 to launch a second church that will be a part of a network of churches. Since moving into the new facility, the church has experienced an annual rate of growth of 20 percent. The elders recognized that the

church would soon reach the maximum number of people that can be accommodated in the facilities. Three options were considered by the church eldership: a second service, a second campus, or additions to the existing campus. The first two were deemed at odds with the church understanding of the nature of a healthy church. The latter option was considered too costly and untimely for it to be a viable proposal. Furthermore, the church had just purchased property, and there was little desire to assume more debt or spend any more funds on facilities.

The elders presented a proposal to the church for Bardstown Christian Fellowship to become two congregations in the fall of 2012 with two new identities, two Lead Pastors, two elder teams, and two autonomous groups of church members that will meet in one building at different times therefore making resources available for ongoing church planting and missions.

Bardstown Christian Fellowship was reconstituted as the BCF Network. The two churches came together to form the BCF Network of Churches. Each individual church will appoint from their own elders two men to serve on a council of elders made up of an equal number of elders from each member church. This council of elders will function as the BCF trustees and will provide direction for the work that the churches do together. The network will own the property, share administrative staff and costs, and jointly fund mission goals. Together, the churches will on occasion partner in some support ministry areas such as children, youth, women and men's ministry activities as well as provide biblical counseling and training seminars available to all network church members. The network will develop future church plants with a vision for at least one more church to be planted in the existing campus.   Beyond that the network will consider the purchase of a second campus that will provide a gathering place for three more church plants. The conviction of the BCF Network is that the need for more healthy churches is far greater than the need for more church buildings. We also believe this method of church planting will be rapid and viable as the church plant will not be

burdened by the costs of renting space, purchasing equipment, developing children and youth ministries or paying for administrative support. These expenses will be shared within the network and therefore free the individual churches to invest their resources on reaching the un-churched and making disciples.

Rationale

Jesus uses the word *ekklesia* when referring to the church in Matthew 18:17, stating, "If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church."[5] In that section he is given instructions specifically related to membership within the local church. When a brother sins against another brother and does not repent then a decision is deferred to the gathered congregation of believers, the *ekklesia*, to remove him from that local and visible body of believers. In using the term e*kklesia* Jesus indicates that the act of assembling together as one group is integral to the authority and identity of that particular church.

In order to best understand the rationale for the creation of a property-sharing network of churches it is necessary to understand both what a church is and what the mission of the church is. Indeed, it is largely based on an understanding of what the church is and what the church is to be doing that has led the elders of Bardstown Christian Fellowship to lead the church to develop this network.

The nature and mission of the church will be considered in chapter two. Part of the rationale of this project is the understanding of the church as being a gathering of baptized believers who covenant together to worship God and make disciples.

> What shall we say constitutes a local church on earth? The answer which the Bible gives, I think, is simple and straightforward: a local church is constituted by *a group of Christians gathering together bearing Christ's own authority to exercise the power of the keys of binding and loosing*. Three things, then, are necessary for a

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[5]Unless otherwise noted, all Scripture quotations are taken from the English Standard Version.

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church to be a church: you need Christians, a gathering that bears Christ's authority, and the exercise of that authority in the keys.[6]

A church then, as Leeman correctly points out, is a gathering of Christians that exercises the authority given to it to fulfill the mission it has received in order that it be a display of Christ. The church is comprised of members who gather to worship and who appoint from its own members elders to provide spiritual oversight. Members of the church are to be baptized believers who commit to serve and minister to one another. Together the members of the church will be a witness of Jesus Christ in order to fulfill their mission of making disciples.

The act of gathering together is a determinative element of the nature of a true church. A group calling itself a church that does not gather together at one time and in one place is therefore not a church as understood by the use of the term *ekklesia* in Matthew 18. It might well be multiple churches, but multiple gatherings do not constitute one church. This understanding of the church as being an assembly or gathering of believers that worship together is key to the rationale for Bardstown Christian Fellowship developing a network of churches as opposed to developing multiple services or multiple campuses. This becomes clearer as we examine to whom Christ has given authority over the church. In Matthew 18, Christ grants authority to determine who is or is not a member of the church to the identifiable assembly of Christians.

When does a gathering of Christians become a church? Christians gather together all the time, at work, at concerts, in classrooms, but their act of gathering alone does not define them as a church. This will be further explored in this project. The rationale for this project is that it is both the act of gathering, as implied by the word *ekklesia* itself, as well as the means for which the members have gathered that makes

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[6]Jonathan Leeman, "9 Marks Ejournal," accessed May 5, 2012, http://www.9marks.org/journal/theological-critique-multi-site-what-exactly-"church".

such a gathering a church. The duly ordained purpose for the church is to come under the preaching of the scriptures, to exercise the ordinances of baptism and the Lord's Supper and to fulfill the mission of the church, which is to make disciples.

A growing church then has options to consider when dealing with very practical issues related to space and organization. The decision to develop multiple services or multiple campuses distorts the very nature of the church. A church could consider sending a group of her members to establish a new church elsewhere. This is a legitimate and positive response to growth. Certainly for those in a large city or community where there might be rationale for establishing a new church in a location currently underserved by gospel preaching churches, this is commendable and to be encouraged. However, in reality many growing churches are in towns and cities in which it is possible to drive by many churches to get to our church. Furthermore, sending a group of believers to a separate location necessitates duplicating resources and investing funds in new accommodations and equipment. Alternatively, a church could consider a new gathering place, perhaps building a larger building. This would be a perfectly reasonable response to growth. However, I argue that there is an alternative to a costly building campaign and tying up valuable resources into bricks and mortar. That alternative is the establishment of a network of churches that partner together to share property and resources and support each other in our mission to make disciples.

As Bardstown Christian Fellowship transitioned into a network of multiple churches that share property, resources, support staff and mission partnerships, it became necessary for a leadership team of the BCF Network to be established. This team needed to establish goals, policies and procedures to govern the life and activities of the network.

Definitions

References to "Bardstown Christian Fellowship, Bardstown, Kentucky" will often be referred to in this project as BCF.

The purpose of this project is to transition BCF into a network of churches. It is important then to define our use of the term church and network. For the purpose of this project we will recognize the definition of the church as agreed by the New Hampshire Baptist Confession of 1833,

> Of a Gospel Church We believe that a visible Church of Christ is a congregation of baptized believers, associated by covenant in the faith and fellowship of the gospel; observing the ordinances of Christ; governed by his laws, and exercising the gifts, rights, and privileges invested in them by his Word; that its only scriptural officers are Bishops, or Pastors, and Deacons, whose qualifications, claims, and duties are defined in the Epistles to Timothy and Titus.[7]

The term "network" is a relatively new one when related to ecclesiology. It is a word used synonymously with the word *association*. The Merriam Webster's dictionary helpfully defines the term as, "an interconnected or interrelated chain, group, or system."[8] A network of churches therefore is defined as being more than simply a group of churches with shared beliefs, it is a group of churches that is, at its core, interconnected and interrelated. The Bardstown Christian Fellowship Network is a group of churches that hold to the same statement of faith, that share property, administrative staff, equipment and resources, and that work together to pursue common missional objectives.

The mission of the church is to make disciples of all nations. This is done through evangelism. This project uses the Lausanne definition of evangelism as set out in the Lausanne Covenant of 1974:

> To evangelize is to spread the good news that Jesus Christ died for our sins and was raised from the dead according to the Scriptures, and that as the reigning Lord he now offers the forgiveness of sins and the liberating gifts of the Spirit to all who repent and believe. Our Christian presence in the world is indispensable to evangelism, and so is that kind of dialogue whose purpose is to listen sensitively in

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[7]"New Hampshire Confession of Faith, 1833," accessed April 30, 2012, http://www.reformed reader.org/ccc/1833newh.htm.

[8]"Network," *Merriam Webster Dictionary*, accessed April 30, 2012, http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/network.

order to understand. But evangelism itself is the proclamation of the historical, biblical Christ as Saviour and Lord, with a view to persuading people to come to him personally and so be reconciled to God.[9]

Limitations and Delimitations

In order to complete this project it is required to acknowledge one limitation and delimitation. This project was completed over a fifteen-week period. This limitation means that the project provides a snapshot of the development of the BCF Network. The fifteen-week period started with the launch date of the two churches. Following their launch, the leadership of the two new churches met to develop the BCF Network.

The delimitation requires that the focus of the project is specific to the development of the leadership team of the network and not the development of the individual churches that make up the network. These leaders are elders of the member churches that have been appointed to the BCF Network Council. The project oversees the development of this team as they began their new work together.

Research Methodologies

In order to measure the accomplishment of this project's goals a number of research methods will be employed. A leadership team was established from the churches that make up the BCF Network. During the 15-week period that the project covers the team of 4 elders met in order to develop goals, policies, and protocols for the network. In addition to regular meetings of this team the development phase also included a day away during which the team met to pray together, worship together and strategize together. At the end of the team development phase the team members were asked in an informal meeting to share the extent to which they understand the goals and purposes of the BCF Network.

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[9]The Lausanne Committee for World Evangelization, accessed April 30, 2012, http://www.lausanne.org/lausanne-1974/lausanne-covenant.html.

In order to develop and implement an administrative plan for the network, other church networks were contacted. Multi-site church leaders were contacted in order to gather information from them about how they handle administrative oversight of their campuses and activities. This information was presented to the BCF Network Council as a resource for developing the network's own policies related to facilities, finances, staff and activities. An administrative plan was adopted and implemented by the BCF Network Council. The leadership team also met to set goals and objectives for the Network. The administrative plan and network goals were shared with the churches following their adoption. At the end of the fifteen-week period, a feedback group of members from both churches was informally asked how well they know and understand the network purpose and goals. They were also asked to share any perceived strengths and weaknesses of the plans and goals in conversation with myself and other directors.

A resource has been developed to teach new members of the BCF Churches the structure, values, goals, and biblical principles undergirding the network. This document has been incorporated into the new member classes of the individual churches. A class evaluation was given to new members to evaluate how well they understand the goals and nature of the BCF Network.

The final goal was the development of personal leadership coaching and mentoring skills in order that I might grow in my own ability to mentor leaders and church planters within the BCF Network. At the end of the fifteen-week period, staff, and interns associated with the BCF Network were asked to complete a confidential evaluation of my strengths and weaknesses in this area.

Conclusion

The motivation for developing this project is to present an on-site church planting network as a viable church planting model that maintains biblical and ecclesiological integrity. The BCF Network of Churches seeks to make disciples in a

manner that creatively stewards resources, reproduces leaders, and expands its reach without burdensome costs or blurring long accepted ecclesiological norms of Baptists who affirm the autonomy of the local church as a biblical prerequisite for what constitutes a true church.

CHAPTER 2

BIBLICAL AND THEOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVES
ON THE BCF CHURCH PLANTING MODEL

As a church considers how best to fulfill the mandate to make disciples, it will find a precedent set within the New Testament for doing so. The model for disciple-making presented by the Apostles is to start churches. From town to town churches are started, elders appointed, and assemblies of believers are gathered to come under apostolic teaching and for the discipline and training of the believers. The process of disciple-making is revealed in the New Testament. Christ first calls men to follow him and then he trains them and sends them. Those that are sent start local assemblies of disciples. The mission of the church, to go and make disciples of all nations, is a work that requires the planting of churches. In the New Testament, we see this played out as the Gospels make way for the Acts of the Apostles to be followed by the epistles, each giving instruction and doctrine to those assemblies. The Bible sets out the motive and a method for starting churches. Any strategy for planting churches needs to be grounded in God's word.

The following will look at four passages that deal specifically with the nature of the church. These four passages are instructive in that they set out parameters for determining what constitutes a church. As Bardstown Christian Fellowship explores the options available to it for starting churches within Bardstown, these passages of Scripture have proven especially insightful. Particular attention is given to the fact that these Scriptures present requirements for the individual local groups of disciples to form congregations of believers who regularly gather together.

In Matthew Chapter 18, Jesus uses the term *ekklesia* for the second time:

> If your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault, between you and him alone. If he listens to you, you have gained your brother. But if he does not listen, take one or two others along with you, that every charge may be established by the evidence of two or three witnesses. If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church. And if he refuses to listen even to the church, let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector. (Matt 18:15-16)

The English word "church" is used as a translation of this Greek word. The word itself denotes an assembly or gathering. It can also, at times, be used to refer to a mob. Intrinsic to the nature of the word *ekklesia* is the idea of a visible and bounded group of people that has come together at a specific time, in a specific place, for a specific purpose. The instructions Jesus gives in Matthew 18 to the church helps to provide a foundation from which the church can be defined. Psalm 22:22 gives a reference to the congregation of God's people. It is important to note that the Hebrew term for "congregation" used by the psalmist is translated *ekklesia* by the writer in Hebrews 12:12. A closer examination of the Old Testament use of this word will help provide a clearer understanding of the biblical nature of the church. In Acts 2 Luke gives an historical account of the formation of the first such church. The manner in which these early believers gathered provides a framework for the gathering of believers today. Finally, First Corinthians is the pastoral epistle that most specifically gives direction related to how a local church should be led. First Corinthians 5 in particular provides direct commands about how a church is to act relationally among its members.

Matthew 18:15-20

In Matthew 16, Peter has confessed that Jesus is the Messiah. It is upon this gospel declaration that Jesus promises to build a new community of faith. In chapters 16 through 18 of Matthew's Gospel, Jesus sets out what this new community of faith is to look like and how it will be led. In Matthew 18 Jesus deals specifically with disputes between believers. It is worthy of note that issues related to the unity of the Christian

community and how believers are to relate to one another are matters of primary significance to Jesus.

The dispute between brothers that Jesus is addressing in Matthew 18 is of a personal nature. In this instance a believer has offended another believer. These are two followers of Christ who know each other and have an established relationship. It would appear that the two believers Jesus has in view are two people from within the same local body of Christians. They are members of the same church. Jesus sets out clear steps that Christians are to follow to deal with conflicts between one another. The goal is to preserve the unity, and therefore the witness, of the church. More specifically, the goal of such loving confrontation is the restoration of the offending party for the sake of his own soul. The fact that Jesus gives such specific instructions proves helpful in so far as it provides a framework that must be present for any group of believers to be considered a true church. As BCF seeks to start new churches it will want to pay particular attention to this framework, for it provides some basic parameters within which the church must exist.

Jesus states that it is possible to enter into and be removed from a particular church. As Jesus speaks of the two brothers it is clear that they are brothers who belong to a particular group, which Jesus calls the *ekklesia*. The term *ekklesia* would have been a familiar term. Mark Dever's volume, *Polity*, recounts one such historical understanding of this word:

> *Ekklesia*, the word is the original for Church, signifies, *to be called out of;* that is, a gospel church consists of such persons, as have been called out of a state of nature into a state of grace, called with an effectual calling, *called out* of the Kingdom of Satan and into the Kingdom of God's dear son, or are judged in charity to be so called.[1]

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[1]Samuel Jones, "A Treatise of Church Discipline and a Directory," in *Polity: Biblical Arguments on How to Conduct Church Life*, ed. Mark Dever (Washington, DC: Center for Church Reform, 2001), 140.

All truly regenerate believers enter into a common assembly that will gather before Christ when Christ returns. This is what the apostle Paul will later refer to as the body of Christ. The assembly that Jesus has in view here, however, is a particular *ekklesia.*

R. T. France provides some helpful insights into the specific use of the term *ekklesia* in this instance:

> One distinctive feature of Matthew's gospel is its use in two passages of the noun *ekklesia* (16:18; 18:17). This was a familiar term to a Greek-speaking Jew, being the regular LXX translation for *qahal*, the 'congregation' of the people of God. Despite frequent statements to the contrary, I can see no improbability in Jesus' use of some such term to describe the group of restored Israelites which he was gathering around himself, and which he would naturally have expected to continue beyond the period of his own ministry . . . . In the retention of so emotive a word from the Old Testament, but now defined as the *ekklesia of Jesus*, he surely intends to indicate that the Christian church now fills the role of the Old Testament congregation of God's people.[2]

It is clear that Jesus is referring to something specific and particular, as opposed to something general and broad. Indeed, both brothers are members of the wider body of Christ, but in this instance Jesus suggests that they are bound to one another in a manner that is more localized. It is therefore a local church that is in view in this use of the term *ekklesia.* The offended brother is to seek to restore the brother privately first, then he is to take with him witnesses (others who would know both brothers), and finally, if there is still no repentance, he is to take it to the whole church. It would be impossible for the brother to take this matter to an assembly of every believer, so there is in view here a localized and particular assembly of believers who are familiar with one another. Craig Blomberg points out that "If a sinner remains recalcitrant, the entire church community must in some sense be made aware of the offense so that the rebellious individual has nowhere to hide. If even this procedure fails to bring repentance, then at the last resort Jesus commands the entire community to dissociate itself from the individual."[3]

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[2]R. T. France, *Matthew: Evangelist and Teacher* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2004), 211.

[3]Craig L. Blomberg, *Matthew*. The New American Commentary Series, Vol.22. (Nashville: Holman Reference, 1992), 279.

The offended believer is required by Christ to bring the offense before the church if the one committing the offense remains unrepentant. If the unrepentant sinner refuses to repent in the presence of the church, then he is to be removed from it. This sanction is one that Christ demands. The breaking of fellowship is frequently referred to as excommunication. The church is to treat the person as an unbeliever, the concern being for his own soul and for the witness of Christ. To treat a person as a pagan or a tax collector as specifically commanded by Christ means to treat him as being on the outside of the church. We see a parallel practice in the tradition of Israel as required by Genesis 17:14, which states that "any uncircumcised male who is not circumcised in the flesh of his foreskin shall be cut off from his people; he has broken my covenant".

The church then is intended to be a gathering of believers who are familiar with one another. There are varying degrees of familiarity with any such group, but it is clear that the group of people about whom Christ is speaking in this instance, namely the church, would know each other. Joseph Hellerman points out that

> The people involved in Matthew 18 are not simply members of an impersonal institution that assembles for a large meeting on Sunday, which we happen to call "church." They are brothers—brothers who share their stuff with one another and brothers who share their hearts with one another. The point here is that Jesus assumes an intimate relational context for the exercise of church discipline. He assumes a family context.[4]

The church in view here is a group that would regularly assemble with one another.

The very act of regularly gathering together as a visible assembly helps to identify who is on the inside and who might be on the outside of the gathering. As J. C. Ryle demonstrates, "Finally if this second course proves useless, we are to refer the whole matter to the Christian congregation of which we are members: we are to 'tell it to the church' (verse 17). Who can tell but the heart which has been unmoved by private

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[4]Joseph H. Hellerman, *When the Church Was a Family: Recapturing Jesus' Vision for Authentic Christian Community* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Academic, 2009), 154.

remonstrance may be moved by fear of public exposure?"[5] The brother has attempted to

deal with the matter in private, but having failed to bring the offender to repentance, he

must now take the matter to the public assembly of the believers.

It is important to stress that there is a witnessing element to this public

gathering. The church was not intended to meet for worship in secret. Christ himself, in

Matthew 5, calls the church a city on a hill and a lamp that cannot be hidden.   So Christ

anticipates that there will be non-members present when the members of the assembly

gather. This again adds to the importance of this public breaking of fellowship with the

unrepentant brother. Blomberg helpfully states this case well:

> Christian disfellowshiping must have two components to it. Primarily, it means not allowing someone to participate in public, corporate fellowship with the church, even as orthodox Jews shunned the "traitorous" tax collectors or unclean Gentiles. But in light of Jesus consistent compassion for pagans and tax collectors, surely he must also want Christians, individually, to continue to reach out to these people and call them to repentance.[6]

In light of the fact that Jesus specifically makes reference to an act brought to the

attention of the church and carried out by the church, there are lessons here that help to

determine the nature of the church.

It can be concluded that the church Jesus has in view is local and particular.

The two brothers would have known each other, and they are to take their matter to the

whole church, which would likewise have been familiar with these brothers. This would

be a group that would regularly assemble with one another. The act of regularly

assembling together at the same time and in the same place is definitive in that it sets one

assembly apart from another. These are commands given to and carried out by particular

churches.

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[5]J. C. Ryle, *Matthew: Expository Thoughts on the Gospels* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1986), 162.

[6]Blomberg, *Matthew*, 279.

Baptist history records that the church has been viewed as a group of believers that regularly gathers together.

> But the church, of which we now treat, means a number of disciples, saints, or believers, that have been baptized, and united together in gospel fellowship, and is called a particular church . . . . A particular church is not parochial, as comprehending all of the same parish; nor diocesan, as if one pastor might have several flocks; nor yet provincial, for there were many churches in Judea…much less national.[7]

Believers are to ordinarily identify themselves as belonging to a particular group of believers. Such a corporate identity is most typically referred to as being in membership of a specific church. Christians are called to belong to a particular group of believes that regularly assemble with one another. Ryle points out, "Our Lord commands that disagreements between Christians, which cannot be otherwise settled, be referred to the decision of the church or Christian assembly to which they belong."[8] R.T. France makes a similar point when he states, "In 18:17 its use requires only that the local group of followers of Jesus is understood to be capable of coming together to reach a joint decision on a case involving unacceptable conduct among its membership."[9]

The members of a particular assembly of believers are given authority to determine who can and cannot be members of it. It is the decision of the church to remove a person from it. The decision does not rest with any person outside of that particular assembly of believers. The members of an individual church, to which these two brothers belong, are to assemble publicly as one assembly in order to make a judgment as to whether the accused is indeed in open and unrepentant sin and is therefore to be set on the outside of the assembly.

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[7]Jones, "A Treatise of Church Discipline and a Directory," 140.

[8]Ryle, *Matthew*, 142.

[9]France, *Matthew*, 243.

Jesus goes on to state that he will be present with the assembly when they gather for this purpose. In Matthew 18:20 the Lord points out that when two or more gather in his name, then he is in the midst of them. When the church gathers for the express purpose of declaring and exalting the name of Jesus, then Jesus himself commits to stand with them. The church has been granted authority to exclude someone from its membership. It is not a secular judgment about rights and wrongs. Rather, it is a sacred act, carried out in the presence of Christ, with Christ's authority, and ultimately for the glory of Christ.

The place where discipline is to be exercised then is to be within the local church. It is not a council of elders or a courtroom of priests and bishops. It is a group of Christians that regularly and faithfully assembles together for the express purpose of exalting the name of Jesus and that is given authority to pass judgment as to whether someone is a true believer or if someone is a false professor that needs to be cut off from the church until the spirit convicts him and brings him to repentance and restoration. John MacArthur helpfully states,

> This great passage also indicates that the place for discipline is within the church. Ekklesia (church) is here used in its basic, nontechnical meaning of a congregation or assembly. In secular Greek literature it was used of town meetings, local gatherings of citizens called together by their rulers to hear official announcements or witness government ceremonies. In the context of Jesus' teaching at this point in his ministry, church refers to any group of redeemed people who assemble in his name.[10]

John MacArthur goes on to point out that

> there is no higher court beyond the local congregation in which discipline is to be administered. No bishop, cardinal, synod, conference, or council has the responsibility for discipline. To delegate discipline to an individual or group beyond the local church is to go beyond the word of God. Whether a local church is composed of a handful of believers or of several thousand members, whether it is a highly organized urban congregation or an informal group of five or six believers on

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[10]John MacArthur, *Matthew 16-23*, *MacArthur New Testament Commentary* (Chicago: Moody, 1988), 134.

a remote mission field, that is where, and only where, discipline is to be administered.[11]

Likewise, among the early church fathers there can be found a similar expression about the Christian assembly being a covenanted group of individual believers. Peter Chrysologus suggests that

> Individual members do indeed have their own duty of personal prayer, but they will not be able to fulfill it if they come to the beauty of that perfect body wrapped up in themselves. There is this difference between the glorious fullness of the congregation and the vanity of separation that springs out of ignorance or negligence: in salvation and honor the beauty of the whole body is found in the unity of the members. But from the separation of the viscera there is a foul, fatal and fearful aroma.[12]

When considering starting new churches, the imperatives explicit in this text must be borne in mind. Jesus has in view a local and particular assembly of believers who gather together regularly and publicly. Furthermore, it is an assembly that would have a degree of familiarity with one another. It is this assembled group of believers that is given a promise that Christ will be present with them as they gather. This same assembly is given the command to remove from their midst the unrepentant sinner. Therefore, a bonded group of believers who regularly assemble together at one time and in one place in the name of Jesus and for the purpose of bearing witness to Christ by their public act of worship is the *ekklesia* that Christ has in view. The act of assembling is intrinsic to the nature of the church. Multiple assemblies, therefore, would constitute multiple churches. If BCF seeks to establish multiple assemblies, then it must establish them as individual, autonomous and appropriately ordered churches.

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[11]Ibid.

[12]Peter Chrysologus, *Matthew 14-28*, Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture, ed. Manlio Simonetti (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2002), 132.

Psalm 22:22

The concept represented by the term *ekklesia* is as much Hebrew as it is Greek. In using the term *ekklesia*, Jesus uses a familiar and culturally significant Greek word while conveying a very Hebrew idea. It is significant to note that the concept of a congregation of God's people originates in the Old Testament. There are two Hebrew words that are often translated in the Septuagint with the Greek word *ekklesia*. The first is the word *qahal*, which translated means "assembly or congregation." It is used in Psalm 22, which states, "I will tell of your name to my brothers; in the midst of the congregation I will praise you" (Psalm 22:22). The second such word is *edhah*, which denotes a more formal political or communal construct, as opposed to a gathering of people. The Illustrated Bible Dictionary provides the following definition: "*Mo'ed* and *eda* come from the root *ya'ad*, 'to appoint, assign, designate'. *Mo'ed* means an appointed time or place, or meeting . . . *eda* occurs 149 times and means a company of people assembled together by appointment.[13] The *edhah* is understood as referring to the people of God as a whole, not a particular assembly of the people of God. The *qahal* is the meeting of God's people at a particular time, in a particular place, and for a particular religious purpose. During the Passover, for example, each individual family is referred to as a *qahal* given specific instructions to prepare for the Passover events. The *edhah* is broader in scope, referring to the people of God being bound but scattered.

The Psalmist in Psalm 22 uses the word *qahal* to speak of a particular assembly of God's people. Hebrews 2:12 quotes Psalm 22:22 from the Old Testament Scriptures:

> For it was fitting that he, for whom and by whom all things exist, in bringing many sons to glory, should make the founder of their salvation perfect through suffering. For he who sanctifies and those who are sanctified all have one source. That is why he is not ashamed to call them brothers, saying, "I will tell of

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[13]J. D. Douglas and N. Hillyer. *The Illustrated Bible Dictionary* (Leicester, England: Inter-Varsity, 1980), 310.

your name to my brothers; in the midst of the congregation I will sing your praise."[14] (Ps 22:22)

The word "congregation" is represented in the letter to the Hebrews by the Greek word *ekklesia,* but is in fact translating the word *qahal* in Psalm 22:22.

The terms *ekklesia* and *qahal* are equivalent words. *Qahal* is used exclusively in the Old Testament as reference to an assembly of God's people at a particular time, for a particular purpose, and in a particular place. According to the *IVP Illustrated Bible Dictionary*, "Qahal occurs 123 times, and comes from a root meaning 'assemble together', whether for war, rebellion, or a religious purpose. It is used in Dt. 5:22, where all Israel is assembled to hear the words of God, and in Dt. 23:3 where solemn statements of excommunication are being made."[15] Reading Psalm 22 provides a clear example of the use of the word *qahal* as referring to a single assembly of God's people. This helps to provide an understanding of why Jesus would choose to use the word *ekklesia* in Matthew 18. He is drawing not only upon the Greek understanding of the word (a gathering or assembly), but also the Hebrew concept of a particular congregation of God's people.

The term *qahal* in Psalm 22:22 is translated by the writer to the Hebrews as a congregation made up of brothers for the purpose of worship. It is a messianic psalm pointing to a future theocratic state. The psalmist speaks of a coming savior praising the name of God in the midst of his brothers, the church. Psalm 22:22 parallels Matthew 18 in which Jesus states that he will be in the midst of the congregation. The meeting of this congregation is intended to be the public assembly of the Lord's people in order to worship God together. Note again the familiarity that this Messiah figure has with those with whom he assembles. He stands in the midst of them. He calls them brothers. They are gathered together in one place. Note here the allusions in this psalm to the words of

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[15]Ibid, 310.

Jesus in Matthew 18, with the reference to the congregation of brothers and his promise to be in the midst of them.

The Hebrew idea of the *qahal*, an assembling of God's people, is paralleled in the New Testament by the development of local and rightly organized congregations. Similarly, the individual local church is represented in the New Testament as a congregation of believers who publicly gather for fellowship, prayer, the breaking of bread, and the apostolic teaching as a continuation of this very Hebrew idea. Therefore, the act of publicly congregating together as one body of believers in one place, at one time, is shown continually in the Old and New Testaments to be intrinsic to the definition of a duly constituted church.

Acts 2:42-47

A further biblical account that is significant when considering the nature of the church as a single gathering is found in Acts 2. Here is found the earliest record of a church gathering, providing a clear picture of what the apostles and early believers understood to be the normative manner in which the corporate church is to gather and relate to one another.

This text demonstrates that there is a unity present in the life of the church, and that unity is expressed most notably in their public gathering. The church would gather daily in the temple, specifically in Solomon's Colonnade. The colonnaded halls that surrounded Herod's temple would have provided adequate meeting space for these early Christians to join together for worship. It has been suggested that around three thousand believers were a part of the Jerusalem church at this point, and there is no reason to believe that they could not or did not gather together in one place. Solomon's Colonnade was an adequate space to accommodate such a large crowd. Schnabel gives a helpful insight into this early meeting of believers:

> The meeting of the believers took place in Solomon's Portico. Josephus describes the hall as being "400 cubits (650 feet or 200 m.) long, with a single nave of 50 feet

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(15 m.) wide, with two rows of columns that were 43 feet (12.5 m) high. The portico was constructed of square stones, completely white," each stone being ca. 33 feet (10 m.) long and 10 feet (3 m.) high. The hall was situated on the eastern side of the temple complex, which dropped steeply to the Kidron Valley.[16]

The early church went to great lengths to secure a single gathering place for the entire church to join together for worship and teaching. Rather than meeting in different locations or at different times, this particular church in Jerusalem met at one time, in one place.

In addition to this very public gathering of the entire church, they also met together in smaller gatherings in homes for joining in fellowship and prayer, teaching, and meeting each other's immediate needs. Stanley Horton presents the following description,

> The picture, then, is of a loving body of worshipping believers meeting daily in the temple, probably in Solomon's Colonnade – with one accord, one mind, one purpose, and sharing table fellowship "in their homes." Each house became a center of Christian fellowship and worship. Mark's mother's home was one such center. Undoubtedly the home of Mary and Martha in Bethany was another.[17]

The very fact that Luke records in Acts 2:46 that the Jerusalem church made a point each week to gather together in the Temple Courts for worship and teaching while at the same time meeting in each other's homes to eat, pray together, and fellowship is important. It was the act of gathering together in public as one body, the *ekklesia*, that distinguished this assembly of believers as a particular community of Christians coming under apostolic teaching and oversight.

In Acts 2 Luke presents a picture of the very earliest church. A church then is a fellowship of believers that meets together at one time, in one place, for the express purpose of worshipping Christ. This congregation also comes together in one another's homes to love, care for, and support one another in the faith. It is a wonderful picture of

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[16]Eckhard J. Schnabel and Clinton E. Arnold, *Acts*, Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2012), 183.

[17]Stanley M. Horton, *Acts.* A Logion Press Commentary. (Springfield, MO: Gospel, 2001), 86.

a worshipping and witnessing community of believers. It is once more evident that the act of God's people gathering together at one time and in one place for worship is definitive when considering the nature of the local church.

When BCF reached the point at which it was no longer possible for each member to gather together at one time and in one place for worship, it had two legitimate options to consider. The church sought to continue in the pattern laid out in Acts 2— a weekly worship gathering of all members as well as smaller gatherings in various homes throughout the week. To maintain the weekly gathering, BCF could opt to move to a larger meeting location in order to accommodate the whole congregation. It seems that having a large enough meeting space that would be adequate for the entire congregation to gather was important for the earliest church. Alternatively, BCF could divide into two churches meeting at two different times. The elders of BCF felt strongly that this second option was preferable as there was no desire to invest more money in a larger meeting space.

Acts 2 also provides a good framework for building use and ownership. Solomon's Colonnade was a public space. The church did not own it but simply made use of the open space to accommodate their meetings. This concept of a church not owning the meeting space, rather making use of an adequate public space, although not necessarily prescriptive, it does prove to be instructive. Unfortunately, a congregation can at times find its sense of identity from the building it owns and uses for worship. The church, however, should never be defined by the building in which it meets. The building serves a very utilitarian function. It is nothing more than a facility in which to assemble. A church does not need to own the building in which it meets in order to have any degree of biblical legitimacy or credibility. Indeed, the idea of the church not owning the building actually serves to better define what the church is and what the church does. BCF therefore has opted to convert the use of the building it owns in

Bardstown from that of being the meeting space of one single church to becoming a public facility that provides a meeting space for multiple churches.

1 Corinthians 5

In addition to the description of life as part of the early church in Acts 2, the New Testament epistles also provide other significant indicators of what constitutes a true church. Far from a picture of individual and disparate believers scattered around the Greco-Roman world, the New Testament presents a picture of particular gatherings of believers that come together for worship and fellowship.

Paul's writings to one such gathering, the church in Corinth, provides further evidence that the particular church is marked out by a public worship gathering at one time and in one place. Paul writes with the presumption that the members of the Corinthian church would be familiar with one another, and would regularly assemble together in one place.

In 1 Corinthians 5 Paul is writing to the church about a particular matter related to the egregious sin of one of their members:

> For though absent in body, I am present in spirit; and as if present, I have already pronounced judgment on the one who did such a thing. When you are assembled in the name of the Lord Jesus and my spirit is present, with the power of our Lord Jesus, you are to deliver this man to Satan for the destruction of the flesh, so that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord. (1 Cor 5:4-6)

He brings to their attention the matter of a member who is living in open and unrepentant sin by continuing in sexual relations with his stepmother. Mark Dever points out that this would have been a particularly scandalous sin:

> Incest was forbidden in Roman law. In fact, one could be expelled from the city of Corinth for engaging in it. Certainly in the Jewish community there were sanctions (including capital punishment) for anyone caught in an incestuous act. In 1 Corinthians 4, Paul had warned about judging by standards that God has not

revealed. Now, here in chapter 5, we see Paul rebuking the church for not judging by the standards that God has revealed.[18]

Paul's admonition to the church is to not associate with this brother and to purge the evil person from among the group of believers. These admonitions make sense when considering the church as being marked out as a public gathering.   The command Paul makes in 1 Cor. 5:5, "deliver this man to Satan," can only be understood in terms of an insider and outsider relationship with the church. John MacArthur explains it below:

> To put the professed believer out of their fellowship, to excommunicate him, would be to deliver such a one to Satan for the destruction of his flesh. Satan is the ruler of the world, and turning a believer over to Satan, therefore, thrusts the believer back into the world on his own, apart from the care and support of Christian fellowship. That person has forfeited his right to participation in the church of Jesus Christ, which he intends to keep pure at all costs. The word deliver (paradidomi) is a strong term indicating the judicial act of sentencing.[19]

It is possible to be a member of the church, on the inside where Christ draws near and Satan cannot destroy. Likewise, it is within the purview of those who are members to examine the life of the other members to ensure that they are not imposters or deceived in order that those who are in open and unrepentant sin might be removed from the church for the sake of their own soul.

Paul implies familiarity between the members of the congregation. This brother would not be a stranger to them. They would be very much aware of who he is and how he is living his life. Their act of publicly associating with him is the point that causes Paul such consternation. His rebuke is to the whole church, suggesting that each one of them is at fault in some way for associating with this brother in public.

To purge is to remove something. It carries with it the idea of cleansing or purifying by removing an offending element from a particular substance. Paul's instruction to the church in Corinth is that this brother, whom they all know, must be removed from participating in their public gathering until he repents. From what is this

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[18]Mark Dever, *Twelve Challenges Churches Face* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2008), 51.

[19]John MacArthur, *1 Corinthians*, MacArthur New Testament Commentary (Chicago: Moody, 1984), 126.

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brother to be removed? It is widely accepted that Paul does not mean that the offending brother is to be removed from a building. It is the *ekklesia,* the assembly of believers and their fellowship together, that is to be off limits to this man. Indeed, Paul is concerned that this brother will not come to a point of repentance if the church continues to permit him to live in open and unrepentant sin while remaining united with them. They must remove him from their gathering as a sign of the eternal separation from the presence of God that he will face as an unrepentant sinner.

In his first letter to the Corinthians Paul goes on to deal with other matters that relate to the public gathering of the believers. He deals with public quarrels, disorderly worship, and the abuse of the Lord's Table. He expresses concern throughout the letter for the purity of their worship and the integrity of their witness. The manner in which professing believers gather together, and the form that gathering takes, impacts the witness of the church.

BCF has opted to reject the notion of becoming one church with multiple gatherings because to do so would distort the biblical view of *ekklesia*. If the church in Corinth had multiple worship assemblies, then Paul's instructions would make little sense. The unrepentant brother would be unknown by many in the church because they would not have assembled with him at any point. The church is instructed to cast out the unrepentant brother from the assembly by breaking fellowship with him. Such an instruction would not be practical if there were more assemblies meeting in various locations. The instruction necessitates familiarity and an existing relationship between the brother and the other members; otherwise there would be no sense of censure or loss on the part of the unrepentant brother.

BCF is seeking to grow by becoming multiple churches rather than a single church with multiple gatherings. In the event that there is a church member living in open and unrepentant sin, it remains clear that the church with which the member regularly assembles will be the people responsible for watching over his soul.

Conclusion

The intent of this chapter has been to present biblical evidence that points to the corporate and visible gathering of the local church as happening at one time and in one place. It is the existence of such biblical precedent that has been the motivation behind developing an onsite church-planting model. While it is clear in the New Testament that churches were of many different sizes, meeting in various kinds of gathering places, it is also apparent that even when a church reached a size that made meeting in one place difficult, the intent to do so remained. For those who affirm congregational church polity and individual church autonomy as the normative approach to church governance, the response to church growth has historically and consistently been the establishment of a new meeting place or the starting of new churches. The earliest Baptists looked to the visible gathering of the church as being a point of demarcation for any one body of believers. The 1644 London Baptist Confession states it in this way:

> That Christ has here on earth a spiritual kingdom, which is the Church, which He has purchased and redeemed to Himself, as a particular inheritance: which Church, as it is visible to us, is a company of visible saints, called and separated from the world, by the Word and the Spirit of God, to the visible profession of the faith of the Gospel, being baptized into the faith, and joined to the Lord, and each other, by mutual agreement, in the practical enjoyment of the ordinances, commanded by Christ their head and King.[20]

The church is a visible company of saints, an *ekklesia*, marked off from the world. It is from within this particular visible congregation that elders are chosen, the word is taught, the ordinances are observed, discipline is administered, and worship is offered to God. To shift the nature of the church from one particular company of saints to multiple companies is to do harm to the order of the church, and potentially to the integrity of her witness.

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[20]"The London Baptist Confession of Faith, 1644," accessed December 4, 2013, http://www.spurgeon.org/~phil/creeds/bc1644.htm.

CHAPTER 3

EVALUATION OF VARIOUS MODELS FOR
CHURCH MULTIPLICATION AND
PLANTING NETWORKS

Many models exist for churches seeking to grow and reproduce through the

development of a resource-sharing network. Churches that grow to a certain point

develop a resource base in terms of people, experience, facilities, and funds that are not

immediately available to any new church plant. The multisite church movement is, in

many ways, a response to a desire to reproduce, while maintaining the ability to share

resources, leadership, and strategy. House church networks have developed with a

similar goal in view, although with the emphasis on the need to maintain small

congregations, within a larger network, that can resource those churches. This chapter

will provide a summary of these approaches by assessing the strengths and weaknesses of

these models. A comparison between these two models for church reproduction and the

BCF Network model will demonstrate the potential within an on-site church planting

structure to accomplish many of the same objectives.

A Summary of the Multisite Model

According to *Multisite Church Roadtrip*,[1] there are now well over 3,000

churches in the United States that have become multisite. A far-reaching report compiled

by Warren Bird and Kristin Walters, *Multisite is Multiplying*,[2] states that it is possible to

find churches with multiple campuses in every state in the USA.

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[1]Surratt, Geoff, Greg Ligon, and Warren Bird, *Multisite Church Roadtrip: Exploring the New Normal* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2009), 217.

[2]Warren Bird and Kristen Walters, *Multisite Is Multiplying*, accessed February 12, 2013, http://pastoralized.com/wp-content/uploads/2013/01/LN_multi-site_report-1.pdf.

Distinctive Aspects of the Multisite
Network Model

The multisite church defines itself as being one church meeting in multiple locations. Multiple campuses, multiple worship services, common leadership, joint staff, and a single budget characterize multisite churches. Such churches are distinct from a traditional church-planting model, in that the new campus is not initially intended to become an independent and self-sustaining church. The strategy is to expand the reach and scope of an existing church in order to make more disciples, rather than start new churches.

Greg Allison of The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary describes multisite churches as

> …one church meeting in multiple locations—different rooms on the same campus, different locations in the same region, or in some instances, different cities, states, or nations. A multisite church shares a common vision, budget, leadership and board. As this definition indicates, this phenomenon is composed of several varieties of multisite churches.[3]

Allison helpfully points out that there are varieties of multisite church models. There are, however, core characteristics that are common across the multisite movement.

The research conducted by Bird and Walters provides a helpful snapshot of a few of these distinctions. Churches with multiple campuses experience rapid growth during their first year, "the average first year growth at a new campus is 43 percent with an average of 16 percent growth in the second year."[4] The report also notes "4 out of 5 multisite churches report an increase in lay leadership development."[5] Common leadership and a joint budget serve to spur growth and momentum. As the church develops new campuses, the resources available to the church expand.

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[3]Gregg R. Allison, *Historical Theology: An Introduction to Christian Doctrine* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2011), 609.

[4]Bird and Walters, *Multisite is Multiplying*, 10.

[5]Ibid., 14.

One unique characteristic of the multisite model is the use of technology to maintain uniformity. An issue that multisite churches face is how to maintain unity, and a common identity, between the various campuses. Typically, multisite churches will opt for a primary teaching pastor who will preach the same message at each location, either in person, through a surrogate in the case of a campus pastor, or by video. According to Birds and Walters, "46 percent use all in-person teaching. 34 percent use combination of in-person and video. 20 percent use almost all video."[6]

**The Motivation for Development of
Multisite Network**

In the past decade, there has been a significant growth in the number of multisite churches. As stated above, there are now 3,000 churches that have multiple campuses, and this number is growing. It is not possible to fully understand the multisite phenomenon without considering the various reasons that churches have for becoming multisite.

In the study *Multisite Roadtrip*, various leading proponents and practitioners of multisite church share their experiences. One such leader is Wayne Cordeiro, one of the earliest modern multisite proponents, who led his church in Hawaii to develop multiple campuses. Cordeiro explains his motivation:

> Our goal for satellites is not necessarily to add locations. It is to develop new leaders. It is to edge these emerging leaders into their own teaching, where one day we can release them as stand-alone churches. When young leaders go out with this model, they have time to build relationships, develop teams, think about evangelism projects, do community outreach and build leaders.[7]

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[6]Ibid., 17.

[7]Surratt, Ligon, and Bird, *Multisite Church Roadtrip*, 37.

Cordeiro is atypical in that he initially expressed a desire for these campuses to become spin-off churches where possible. His desire to use the satellites as a means to develop and reproduce leaders is consistent with most multisite proponents.

A strong voice promoting the development of multisite churches has been James MacDonald, the pastor of Harvest Bible Chapel in Chicago. MacDonald suggests that one overarching motivation for developing multisite churches is the multilocation dynamic of the church seen in Acts: "There is definitely a multilocation dynamic to the church in Acts. And I don't see anything in Scripture that forbids it. And technology allows it and abundant fruitfulness tends to force it and church planting doesn't protect us from it. We arrived at it reluctantly because we can't discount it from Scripture."[8] For MacDonald, the fact that the Bible does not explicitly forbid multisite churches, coupled with the fact that there are pragmatic reasons for it, serves as a compelling motivation for a rapidly growing church to develop multiple campuses. On the one hand, a lack of space in an existing campus forces the question: How can the church continue to grow? On the other hand, the notion that there are other geographic regions that the church could more effectively reach if it had a physical presence in that area leads the church to consider how best to reproduce themselves in an underserved neighborhood.

John Piper, the former pastor of Bethlehem Baptist Church in Minneapolis, was faced with considering and defending the decision to reorganize his church into a multisite church. He has thoughtfully, and thoroughly, considered a theological and biblical approach to the multisite proposal. While some proponents of multisite fail to adequately provide an account of their considerations of the biblical implications related to the multisite model, Piper has proven himself to be a refreshing alternative:

> When John Piper spoke to the congregation about the church elders' decision to go multi-site, he emphasized two main points: 1. Stewardship: "Our first sanctuary,

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[8]Scott McConnell, *Multi-Site Churches: Guidance for the Movement's Next Generation* (Nashville: B&H, 2009), 22.

which lasted 110 years, held 400. The current one holds 1,000. Is it better theology to build a bigger sanctuary, hope that an adequate amount of parking appears, and risk having an empty albatross in coming years, or to develop multiple campuses, build for about 1,000 each, maybe 5 of them, covering perhaps 10,000 people total? 2. Evangelism: There are hundreds of people who are within driving distance of us and who, in not treasuring Christ, are not heading for heaven . . . It's not an option for us to avoid thinking about these people."[9]

Being wise and faithful stewards of the resources they have been entrusted with coupled with a passion for reaching unreached communities are the two strongest motivations a church has for embracing the multisite model. The authors of *The Multisite Roadtrip* explain,

For many churches, the biblical motivation for embracing the multi-site model isn't very controversial. Churches want to fulfill the Great Commission by giving more opportunities for the gospel to be shared. They want to obey the Great Commandment by taking the love of Christ to the people, meeting them where they are. These churches believe that new campuses are places where lost sheep and coins are sought out, and where lost children are welcomed home.[10]

Strengths of the Multisite Network Model

In the traditional church-planting model, the mother church will experience a loss of resources and possibly even a slowing down of growth that can take time to recover from. A church that transitions from a single site church into a multisite church, with campuses located in alternative venues provides an initial investment of people, leadership, and resources. The return on that investment typically comes back to the sending church. The church continues to grow. The leadership and staff who develop the new campus remain a part of the same team. The budget expands as new venues bring funds into the same pool. In the case of traditional church planting, a new church will often struggle to build sustainability, it can take several years before the church planter develops an adequate resource base to be financially viable. Early on a new

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[9]Surat, Ligon, and Bird, *Multisite Church Roadtrip*, 201.

[10]Ibid, 200.

church plant suffers for a lack of resources, manpower, and administrative oversight. This is not the case when a church starts a new campus.

In addition to the resource-sharing benefit of the multisite model that makes for rapid and relative risk-free reproduction, it is also the case that the multisite church reproduces itself much quicker than most other churches. Walters and Bird concluded in that

> a respectable number of multisite campuses are in turn birthing campuses of their own. At the same time, multisites are planting other churches. This means that multisite and church planting seem to go hand in hand. Multisites reach more people and mobilize more volunteers. The evidence seems to strongly confirm these healthy outcomes.[11]

In one sense, it is apparent that the multisite church is able to become rapidly viable. It is much more likely to be in a position to reproduce itself again than a traditional church plant. Furthermore, the evidence points to the fact that multisite churches are able to support the development of church plants in addition to multiple campuses. For some multisite churches reproducing campuses and starting new churches are two parallel tracks. The growing church finds itself in a stronger position to send leaders and release funds for a new church plant after it has itself become a multisite church.

Other indicators suggest that new campuses have a much higher survivability than new churches. The Walters and Bird study shows, "only 10% indicated that they've closed a campus. That number suggests a very healthy 'still open' rate of 90%. Thus 9 of 10 churches with multisite campuses are still pressing forward."[12] This figure places the likelihood of success for starting new campuses as being greater than that of starting new churches. The risk is absorbed across the whole church, and resources are immediately available to a campus that would not be readily available to a new church.

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[11]Bird and Walters, *Multisite is Multiplying*, 3.

[12]Ibid., 24.

The fact that the pastor of the church leads the same team across the various campuses provides consistency and uniformity. This is a significant strength of the multisite model. There is built into the structure high level of accountability, staff development, and the sharing of best practices. Surratt, Ligon, and Bird sum up the strengths of multisite in this manner: "The advantages of being multi-site include greater accountability, sharing of resources (stewardship), the infusion of trained workers, shared DNA (vision and core values), greater prayer support, a preestablished network for problem solving, not neding to reinvent the wheel, and connection with others doing the same thing."[13] The preaching and leadership ability of a seasoned pastor of a large church is being utilized across the board, benefitting each new campus from that skill set.

Weaknesses of the Multisite
Network Model

The multisite phenomenon provides a compelling option for churches that are seeking a way to be wise stewards of their funds, staff, and property while at the same time maintaining evangelistic growth. However, there are significant weaknesses to this model that cannot be overlooked, most notably, the insufficient biblical and historical precedent.

John Piper and James MacDonald stress that the Scriptures do not forbid the establishment of multiple campuses, and pragmatics seems to suggest it. It is accurate to suggest that the Bible does not expressly forbid the development of churches meeting in multiple locations at various times. However, the New Testament presents a picture of a local church that regularly meets together in one place. In Acts 2 the church gathers weekly in Solomon's Colonnade as a meeting place large enough for the whole group to gather at one time. While multisite is not expressly forbidden, neither is it clearly suggested. Furthermore, there are expressly stated imperatives given to the church that become much more difficult to carry out in the context of an unassembled church. The

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[13]Surratt, Ligon, and Bird, *Multisite Church Roadtrip*, 39.

requirement of Matthew 18 and 1 Corinthians 5 to remove the unrepentant sinner necessitates the coming together of the whole church in one place, at one time, in order to exercise church discipline on a brother. In the case of the multisite church it is not clear who would assemble, at what time, and in what place, in order to gather to for that purpose. Indeed, it is not clear what the unrepentant sinner is to be cast out from if there is no regular meeting of the whole assembly.

The motivations for starting multiple campuses are sound, in so far as it is wise for the church to desire to be faithful stewards of their resources and to seek to reach unreached communities. That being said, it is not altogether clear that the multisite model is the most sound means to do either. One church owning or leasing multiple worship venues ties up money and resources. Financial difficulties experienced by the church as a whole can end up requiring the closure of campuses not immediately responsible for those difficulties. If the church as a whole finds itself in financial difficulty, it may make cost cutting decisions that impact a campus, but the individuals that attend worship at that campus have no input in that decision, or ability to respond to it. The church may respond to the needs of the whole at the expense of the individual needs of any one local worship venue, with the needs of a local community not being the primary factor being considered.

Evangelistically, the multisite movement has proven effective. However, the mission of the church is not limited to evangelism. The church is called to make disciples. The multisite movement has emphasized the importance of the weekly gathering and internal leadership development. There is an expressed desire for a more excellent worship experience and a highly skilled leadership to be developed to reproduce those experiences in multiple contexts. However, there is an observed lack of emphasis in many multisite churches on the training of leaders to mentor, disciple, and teach other believers. It is, as a movement, an event-driven ministry mindset. In some cases, the focus of the church leadership and staff is fixed on the programming of an event and the

building of a crowd rather than on member care and shepherding of souls. The point here is not that this is a distinction of the movement, but rather that this is the gravitational pull of the movement. The model lends itself to crowd-building and event-planning. The leadership structure of the typical multisite church serves to reinforce that crowd building drive. The preaching pastor at each campus, and most of the elders, will not typically worship regularly with all of the members that they are given the responsibility to oversee. Likewise, the campus pastor will not be the primary teacher of the members attending the campus he is responsible for. This is not a factor unique to the multisite movement. Many mega churches are faced with the same challenge, but it is a challenge compounded within a multisite church. It is difficult for an elder to effectively shepherd a member he has never met and never worshipped alongside. It is all the more difficult for a campus pastor to shepherd a person he does not regularly have the opportunity to preach to. The preaching becomes divorced from the congregation, often developed and delivered by a team, rather than by a body of elders who are seeking to care for the souls of members they know and love personally.

The challenge most unique to the multisite movement is the emphasis on the preaching gifts and skill set of one primary leader. Many multisite churches are built on the ability of one man. Often a preacher has pronounced skills and giftedness that generate rapid growth that is unable to be accommodated by a large enough campus. This is the case with Bethlehem Baptist Church in Minneapolis, North Point Community Church in Atlanta, Mars Hill in Seattle, and Harvest Bible Chapel in Chicago. When decisions are being made in an attempt to expand, or accommodate, the size of the preaching ministry of one man, the model is at risk of collapse when that man is no longer with the church. Furthermore, it places an unhealthy dependence on the giftedness of one man, rather than reproducing other men to become gifted pastors. It can therefore become tribal in nature by producing followers of a certain leader.

Comparison of Multisite Network
Model and BCF Network

The BCF model of a property-sharing church-planting network in effect reverses the multisite model. Rather than being one church in numerous locations, the BCF Network seeks to be numerous churches in one location. The same motivating factors that drove the proponents of multisite to develop this model, such as best use of resources, rapid reproduction, and maintaining sustainability, were also factors in the development of the BCF Network.

The elders of BCF desired to be wise stewards of the resources given to them. They considered the ways that BCF could continue to reach more people without unnecessarily tying up critical ministry resources. The essence of the BCF Network is very similar to the multisite model. There are multiple worship opportunities, a shared identity, a common vision and values, administrative oversight and accountability, as well as an emphasis on leadership development and training. The financial burdens and risks are pooled between the member churches therefore making viability of any new worship option much easier to sustain.

Within the BCF model the church itself is reproduced. The new worship gathering becomes a church with biblical leadership, identifiable membership, its own budget, meaningful member care, and accountability. The new worship gathering, which happens to be at a different time, rather than at a different location, succeeds in reaching people that were otherwise unreached by the sending church. Furthermore, it succeeds in pooling together valuable resources as the member churches share the property and the administrative staff, as well as hold in common a jointly developed strategy for making disciples internationally.

At the same time the BCF Network model of on-site church planting serves to maintain the relationship between the elders and the congregation. Each new church planted is shepherded by a group of elders appointed by, and from within, that congregation. The elders will always regularly worship with their members. They will

be committed to making disciples and developing new leaders within that one congregation. The preaching and teaching ministry of the church is seeking to be responsive to the pastoral needs of the members of that new church.

A Summary of the Missional House Church Model

The house church movement is in many ways an earlier variant of the multisite church development. It could be argued that the house church network is the original church-planting model, as the New Testament suggests that it was in the homes of believers that the earliest churches gathered.

Motivation for Development of Missional House Churches

There are numerous motivations for developing house churches. J. D. Payne in *Missional House Churches,* states that "According to Louise Goodstein's article in the *New York Times*, as many as 1500 groups in fifty states are listed on various websites."[14] Some are less healthy than others. The focus of this summary is those house churches deliberately started as a means to be wise stewards of resources and effective in evangelism. This subset of house churches is referred to as Missional House Churches. Missional House Churches are often started in response to a strong desire to grow evangelistically while preserving their simplicity.

The simple nature of the house church is a strong motivating factor for most house church proponents. A house church typically would not meet in a purpose-built, or purpose-owned, worship facility. Instead, house churches meet in public spaces, such as a home, or a coffee shop. A Missional House Church is a small gathering of people that have come together to worship and minister to one another. Very little money is spent on buildings and facilities. Members meet in each other's homes for a corporate worship

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[14]Jervis David Payne, *Missional House Churches: Reaching Our Communities with the Gospel* (Milton Keynes, UK: Paternoster, 2008), 13.

meeting. Meeting in homes frees up money for the work of evangelism and reaching the unreached.

Given the size and simple nature of a house church, it is also unlikely that the church hires a full-time staff. Rather, there is a participatory element to membership and worship. Instead of one person leading the singing, all who come are encouraged to take part in the leading of the music. Likewise, instead of a full-time pastor providing the primary teaching, the Bible study, or a sermon, is led by any one of a number of members, and everyone else is invited to participate.

The simplicity of the model, and the organic nature of leadership and member participation in ministry, can, on occasion, lead to rapid growth.   A house church is easy to reproduce. As an existing house church reaches capacity, it will start a second house church. Very little is required to start a new work. There is no need to locate a building, raise funds, to purchase equipment, or train a leader for the church to reproduce itself.

Distinctions of Missional House Churches

A Missional House Church is characterized by a number of factors. First, it is organic and flexible in nature. It is not institutionalized in the way that most churches are. The house church has little, if any, organizational structure. Leadership decisions tend to be made by the group rather than for the group, "Though a house church may be small in membership (this is not always the case), it considers itself fully autonomous, meaning that, under the headship of Christ and the Word, the church makes its own decisions regarding plans, strategies, purchases, leadership, worship expression, missions and so on."[15] The organic nature of a house church means that the meetings are often relaxed and informal.

House Church advocates stress that in Acts the church is presented as a group of believers meeting together in each other's homes, eating together, coming under the

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[15]Ibid.

teaching of the Scriptures, and singing songs of praise together. The New Testament

suggests that early worship was very simple, participatory, and inclusive of all those who

are present. In many house churches the songs are picked by the participants, the

teaching is a shared responsibility, and the fellowship is around a shared meal. There is

often no programmed order of worship or a passive congregation following instructions

from a professionalized clergy.

One of the core distinctions of the Missional House Church movement is the

strong sense of community between the members. As J. D. Payne points out,

> House churches are not new; in fact they have been around for two thousand years.
> And though they have existed for some time in North America, only recently has
> this expression of the body of Christ started to gain the interest of those outside of
> house churches. The simplicity, community, and high level of participation that is
> required in this expression of church is appealing to many.[16]

Each member of a house church develops a deep and personal relationship with the other

members. There is a strong sense of a familial bond that develops between them.

Members are therefore much more likely to be open and transparent with one another,

sharing in a small group context, and trusting the group to respond to needs and struggles.

Strengths of Missional House Churches

The Missional House Church movement has set out to remain true to the

organic, informal, and relational aspects of the early church. Furthermore, it has sought

to grow rapidly through reproducing itself. There are significant strengths to the model

in accomplishing these objectives.

The greatest strength of the House Church movement has is the high degree of

connectivity between the members of the individual churches. Within a Missional House

Church network, the members within any one church are familiar with one another.

There is a strong sense of accountability built into the model. When considering the

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[16]Ibid, 43.

House Church movement in light of the early church in Acts 2, there is a remarkable

similarity between the two. In Acts 2 the church is gathering daily in homes, they are

eating a meal together, there is a spontaneous and organic nature about their meeting,

whereby there appears to be no set form or structure. In the place of form and structure

there is a reliance on core components. The church presented to us in the New Testament

book of Acts prays together, eats together, observes the Lord's Supper together, gives

toward the poor, sing songs, and comes under the teaching of the apostles. Much like the

early church precedent, *The House Church Book* describes the House Church as a family

get-together:

> As any family get-together proves, we can accomplish the goal of fellowship
> without the need for heavy structure. Families can get along quite well without a
> master of ceremonies, a word of introduction, a special song, a sermon by Father,
> and a vote of thanks by Mother. These formalities happen at weddings and on other
> occasions, but not in everyday life. Church, however, is not to be an artificial
> performance; it is for everyday life, because it is a way of life.[17]

The house church is an organic structure that looks remarkably similar to the picture of

the church gathering in the New Testament.

The simplicity of the meeting aids the connectivity between house church

members. The Missional House Church fosters an environment of personal care, growth,

and accountability. As Steve Timmis states,

> People need to encounter the church as a network of relationships rather than a
> meeting you attend or a place you enter. Mission must involve not only contact
> between unbelievers and individual Christians, but between unbelievers and the
> Christian community. We want to build relationships with unbelievers. But we also
> need to introduce people to the network of relationships that make up that believing
> community so they can see Christian community in action.[18]

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[17]Wolfgang Simson, *The House Church Book: Rediscover the Dynamic, Organic, Relational, Viral Community Jesus Started* (Carol Stream, IL: Barna, 2009), 312, Kindle.

[18]Tim Chester and Steve Timmis, *Total Church: A Radical Reshaping around Gospel and Community* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2008), 59.

Given that the task of the church is to make disciples, it seems the Missional House Church is at an advantage over other church models. The members know each other in a personal way, giving them the ability to look into one another's life to identify areas of error or growth. The close corporate nature of the House Church makes its easier to identify members who are growing or erring.

A further area of strength of the Missional House Church is the rapid pace in which the house church can reproduce itself. J. D. Payne has observed that,

> I have come to the conviction that, if North America will ever experience church planting movements, they will primarily manifest themselves through simple expressions of the body of Christ with many characteristics of missional house churches. Though such churches may not be true house churches by definition, they will manifest similar characteristics.[19]

The pace of planting healthy, gospel-centered churches in North America today is not keeping up with population growth and shifting demographics. Church planting is typically costly, labor intensive, and time consuming. It can take many years and several thousands of dollars before a viable gospel preaching church emerges. Alternatively, the house church is set up for rapid reproduction and unhindered by such concerns. The church members already own the buildings that are needed to establish a new gathering place. The leaders are raised from within, and are typically not required to be full-time employees. There is very little in the way of equipment or supplies to be purchased. In a disarmingly simple way, a house church grows to a point where it become obvious reproduction is critical. Quickly a new leader emerges, a second congregation galvanizes around that new leader and is commissioned by the mother church to start assembling together as a separate church in a different home.

The house church movement has demonstrated a high level of conversion growth compared to other models of church planting. In J. D. Payne's study of Missional House Churches, he has observed the following:

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[19]Payne, *Missional House Churches*, 134.

> From our study, one thing is clear about missional house churches: their evangelism is simple. To our knowledge, none of the churches in our study had highly sophisticated evangelism programs or activities. In fact, we never heard the word "program" used in our research . . . . Phrases such as "relational evangelism", "personal evangelism", "oikos evangelislm", and "friendship evangelism" communicated what they were doing to spread the gospel.[20]

The simplicity of the model lends itself to an uncluttered and clear view of evangelism.

Rather than spending great amounts of money and resources on evangelistic events and

activities, the members are simply equipped and released to go and reach out to non-

believers. Each member is committed to sharing the gospel with their neighbors and

friends, with the aim of bringing a non-believer into their faith community, so that they

can then be discipled and grow in their faith. Evangelism becomes a part of discipleship

rather than an activity that can be opted into. The members of the house church are well

placed to equip and encourage one another to go and reach out through personal

evangelism to their friends and neighbors.

**Weaknesses of the House Church
Network Model**

The proponents and practitioners of the House Church movement point to the

simplicity of the model as the movement's greatest strength. Such simplicity also

produces serious shortcomings. The House Church is often too small, poorly networked,

and ill equipped to make any significant and lasting impact in any one community.

The size of a House Church is both its greatest strength and its greatest

weakness. While a small gathering of believers can provide for a stronger sense of

accountability and pastoral oversight, it often fails to provide strong and clearly

delineated lines of biblical leadership. Many House Churches are not led by a plurality of

biblically qualified elders to shepherd, counsel, and teach the members. A House Church

often institutes shared leadership between the men in the group. A surprisingly high

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[20]Ibid., 83.

number of House Churches demonstrate a hesitancy to institute any formal structure, and are resistant to appoint biblically qualified men into the office of elder. According to a survey conducted by J. D. Payne, 15 percent of churches surveyed were found to have no elder at all, while 61 percent failed to appoint deacons.[21]

The proponents of the movement are correct to identify the churches represented in Acts as being congregations meeting in homes. However, it does not necessarily follow that the church in Acts was a small group of believers with no formal leadership structure. To the contrary, in Titus 1:5 Paul instructs Timothy to appoint a plurality of elders from among the congregation to provide leadership. There is no virtue in avoiding formal structure; rather to do so would be inherently unbiblical. The clear imperative of Scripture is to establish clearly defined lines of membership, leadership, and authority. When Jesus instructs the offended brother to take the unrepentant sinner to the elders in Matthew 18, to whom would he go in a church deliberately devoid of clearly defined leaders? The desire for communal leadership among a large number of house churches and the resulting refusal to formally recognize elders and deacons is a serious flaw in the pattern of the House Church movement.

There are two main strands of Missional House Churches. There are some churches fiercely independent and striving to maintain autonomy and self-determination. Then there is a Presbyterian strand of house churches functioning less like autonomous congregations, but more as multiple cells coordinated and led by a network leadership. There are weaknesses to both approaches. One the one hand, the approach that puts a stress on autonomy provides a helpful emphasis on the church as being defined as a group of covenanting members being led by leaders appointed from within. This congregational approach preserves the biblical pattern of independent churches in various communities, making decisions collectively in accordance to the authority and

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[21]Ibid., 86.

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sufficiency of Scripture. The Bible alone serves as an external authority to any one local church. Many House Churches fiercely defend this view of the local church. However, in an attempt to avoid formal structures, to preserve communal leadership, and to defend church autonomy, many House Churches fail to cooperate and partner with other gospel-centered congregations. House Churches from this strand often find themselves isolated and poorly resourced.

Alternatively, House Churches that are part of a formal network of congregations are more Presbyterian or even Episcopalian in structure. The network leadership is rarely chosen by the church members, but rather by a presbytery of regional leaders. Two such examples include The Crowded House in Sheffield, England, and the Xenos Network, in Ohio. These two prominent House Church networks see the pastor of the House Churches being appointed by a regional presbytery. The pastor leads and provides pastoral support to their House Church. There is no recognized formal church membership. The individual churches are corporately linked to the other House Churches in the network. The group of churches gathers together each week for formal teaching by the lead elder of the network. This is viewed as a joint gathering of the individual churches. It is not viewed as a single worship gathering of a single congregation. There is a strong emphasis on leadership training, evangelism, and rapid reproduction. While the leadership of these networks would identify themselves as a network of churches, in reality they function little differently than a large single church with a single leadership and multiple small groups or cell groups providing pastoral leadership, member care, and missional identity.

The shared resources, rapid reproduction, and strong biblical leadership in the Presbyterian strand of House Churches represent the healthiest elements of the Missional House Church movement. That being said, the significant ecclesiological shortcomings cannot be overlooked. In this model it is not clear who the church is. The New Testament would suggest that the visible local church is represented by the one time and

one place assembly of believers meeting under the oversight of a biblically qualified and appointed leadership. It would be more justifiable to state that this is not a House Church network, but is instead a single church with multiple small groups. The confused use of the term "church" is compounded when there is no formal membership. Who do the pastors oversee? Who do the elders take the unrepentant sinner to in order for them to exercise church discipline? When the sinner refuses to repent, what is the unrepentant sinner being set outside of? If the unrepentant sinner is banned from a meeting (rather than a membership), then in this model, how can he have any hope of restoration? These questions are difficult to satisfactorily answer in the Missional House Church model.

Comparison of House Church Network
Model and BCF Network

The Missional House Church approach to church planting is attractive in its simplicity and relative effectiveness. The pastors of Sheffield's "The Crowded House", Steve Timmis and Tim Chester, have demonstrated just how healthy and effective this model can be in reaching the unreached in a difficult spiritual environment. Their faithfulness in training men, reproduction of leaders, and evangelistic effectiveness is compelling. Much of the aspects that have been observed from Missional House Churches are worth pursuing.

The BCF Network is set up with the community group being the basic building block of the network. Each individual church within the network is essentially structured as a cluster of multiple and multiplying community groups. The church gathers together weekly to sing corporately, come under the preaching of the word, and break bread together around the Lord's Table. It is a visible and public assembly of all covenanting members of that one local church. Aside from a weekly assembly, members also gather together in smaller groups, often meeting in homes. These groups of five to eight families will meet together to care for each other, pray for one another, fellowship

together, and do ministry alongside one another in the city. Member care, mutual
accountability, and oversight of souls happen within the context of these small groups.
However, BCF is cautious not to call these groups 'churches'. The community group is
not the *ekklessia*. All of the elders are not required to attend each group, the group does
not observe the sacraments of the Lord's Supper and baptism, and neither does preaching
take place there. Furthermore, the members of each community group have an obligation
to care for and observe the lives of members of every other community group within the
church, and not just for their own group. The church that gathers each week for corporate
worship and for the administration of the ordinances under the care and oversight of
biblically qualified and appointed elders is organized into smaller groups for member
care, prayer, and ministry.

       BCF has sought to learn valuable lessons from the Missional House Church
movement. The BCF leadership has been determined to preserve the relational
connectivity of members and the intimate oversight of souls that is a pronounced strength
of the Missional House Church movement while growing by planting healthy churches
that are networked together. The establishment of well-resourced community groups
seeks to accomplish this goal. Each individual church within the network has been
designed to function as an organized cluster of small groups scattered across the city.
Rather than being a network of small House Churches led by a common eldership, BCF
is a voluntary network of independent churches, with each member church being a
network of community groups.

CHAPTER 4

TRANSITIONING BCF INTO A CHURCH-
PLANTING NETWORK

The elders of BCF were presented with the challenging demand for more space coupled with the desire to maintain a church family who regularly gather together at the same time and in the same place. The church had come close to maximizing the use of the space we owned, yet believed that the investment of more funds into property would not be wise stewardship. Our study of the Bible led us to the conviction that dividing into multiple worship gatherings was not an option. Instead, motivated by a desire to grow evangelistically through the starting of new churches, and seeking to maximize the potential of existing resources, the option to multiply into two churches that commit to share the property while pursing common mission goals was very attractive. This project period of fifteen weeks charts the various phases of transitioning BCF from being a single church into a network of churches, pursuing a common mission, while sharing ownership of property and resources.

Weeks 1-4: Launching Two New Churches

The first phase of developing BCF into a property sharing church planting network came with the launch of two new churches in August 2012. BCF had been a single church for almost eight years up to this point and was now about to go through a radical restructuring. Prior to the launch of the new structure, BCF developed and engaged in a transitional process to prepare for this change. The launch of Grace Fellowship Church came at the end of several months of preparation. We recognized that the launch of GFC would set into motion the restructuring of BCF as a whole.

In August of 2012 I began the first phase of the project. During weeks 1 to 4 my focus was on the launching of the two new churches. The launch ended a year of preparation and planning that started in August of 2011 when the elders proposed to our members that BCF transition into a property-sharing network of churches. The essence of our proposal could be articulated with the phrase "On-Site Church Planting". Our goal was to release any one individual church from the burden of property ownership, to set up BCF to be an independent association of churches that exists to make property available for churches to gather in, and for the members of BCF to become two new autonomous churches that regularly assemble at the same site but during different times. After a period of evaluation and consultation the church unanimously accepted the proposal. In October of 2011, I recommended to the BCF elders that we employ Brad Woods as Associate Pastor. Brad Woods was specifically brought on staff with the intent of becoming the church-planting pastor and to work alongside the other elders in developing and implementing our goal to launch a second church.

Grace Fellowship Church

In August 2012, at the start of this project period, Brad Woods became the pastor of Grace Fellowship Church. Two other elders from BCF joined Brad Woods in order to launch this new church that would meet on Sunday nights. The two remaining elders and I reconstituted and re-launched the sending church under the new name of Redeemer Fellowship Church. Both RFC and GFC meet in the same facility on Pennebaker Avenue in Bardstown, Kentucky. BCF has been transformed from being a single church into a church-planting network that shares resources and works together to make disciples globally.

Prior to the start of this project period the members of BCF were challenged by the elders to prayerfully discern if they were being led to be a part of joining GFC. In March of 2012, sixteen members shared with the elders their intention to join the church

planting core team being led by Brad Woods. This core team began working to develop and launch the new church plant. They met with Brad Woods on Sunday nights to develop a vision for what would become GFC. During weekly Core Team meetings they worked to develop the vision, bylaws, and membership covenant of the new church. These members were formally commissioned by the remaining members of BCF to start this new church at a formal commissioning service in August 2012. The week prior to the launch of GFC, the core team as well as a couple of other families previously unconnected to BCF, entered into covenantal membership of the new church. They approved the church bylaws and affirmed Brad Woods, Shawn Hughes, and Barry McGuffin as the initial church elders.

During week 1 of this project period, on August 12 2012, GFC launched. The core team had spent the summer developing and promoting the launch within the community. Through the use of social media, targeted outreach events that included a back yard Bible Club, as well as members inviting their own personal contacts, the church launched with close to eighty in attendance. The launch service was followed by an ice cream social in order to develop these new connections and celebrate the establishment of the new church. The attendance at the launch was all the more encouraging given the fact that the other members of BCF were encouraged by the elders of GFC not to attend the launch in order to allow GFC time to develop a clear sense of its own identity. Those in attendance at the launch, other than GFC church members, were unique connections made by the members of GFC.

Pastor Brad Woods and the elders of GFC focused a great deal of attention on developing a distinct identity for the new church. They set out to ensure this was recognized as the launch of a distinct, autonomous, and totally new church. The fact that GFC was meeting in the same building as the sending church, and had close relational ties to it, presented some challenges for them. It was difficult to establish a distinct and clear identity as an independent and autonomous church separate from BCF. Therefore,

the signage on the front of the property was changed to incorporate both the churches new names and logos. Each church secured and developed an online and social media presence. GFC members enthusiastically shared about the new church in the community, wearing their church t-shirts around Bardstown and handing out invitation cards to people in their neighborhoods. At the actual launch service they opted to set up the worship space differently from how it had been used by BCF in the mornings. There were fewer chairs set up. The chairs were set out in a different formation. The stage and lighting were used differently. Floor lamps, candles, a single large communion table, as well as a common loaf of bread on a wood board all served to provide a more intimate aesthetic and differentiated GFC from the sending church. Walking into the building on Sunday night for the launch of GFC felt remarkably different to walking in on Sunday morning for the worship gathering of BCF. This is to their credit and certainly served their goal of developing a distinct identity.

Redeemer Fellowship Church

During the first four weeks of this project period, simultaneous to the development of GFC, the remaining elders and members of BCF were working to develop what would become Redeemer Fellowship Church. The fifty-three members who remained a part of the original BCF would reconstitute themselves into an altogether new church. This proved to be a critical move toward the redevelopment of BCF into a church-planting network.

I had gone into this process of change with a number of concerns. One of my primary concerns was that sending out a church plant from a relatively small sending church could have a potentially crippling effect. I was anxious that the remaining members did not feel left behind, discouraged by fewer numbers, or feel uneasy about the rebuilding work ahead. I was determined not to see GFC planted out of BCF only to leave the sending church unable to go on. This would prove disastrous for both churches.

The decision to rename, re-launch, and reconstitute the sending church, formally known as BCF into the church now known as Redeemer Fellowship Church served to develop a freshness and a rekindled enthusiasm for our work together. There was a very real sense during this season that we were developing something new.

RFC Launch Team

A launch team of twelve had met for a number of months prior to the September 9 launch day. The ministries, activities and values of the church were all subjected to a period of evaluation and discussion. This proved to be a critical juncture in the life of our church as it was an opportunity to reevaluate without creating division. The nature of our church changed with the commissioning of GFC. The elder team had been cut from six to three. The Praise Team also experienced significant loss as three of our musicians left to join GFC. The children ministry looked very different. The families that became a part of GFC were large families with a good number of young children. This reconstituted our children's ministry, making it smaller and older, with fewer workers. Likewise, our Community Groups were affected, losing two groups to GFC.

The most significant adjustment our members had to make was their relationship to the building we meet in. We had to give up ownership of the building. No longer did the church own the property, we were now tenants of it, as the building ownership was transferred to the BCF Network. RFC became a tenant of a shared space, rather than the sole proprietor of the facilities. This affected the way we needed to view the space; no longer could we store things in children's classrooms or set rooms up differently without considering the needs of the other church. Neither could we continue to assume that the building would be available for use at any point. The church needed to become accustomed to consulting a calendar and reserve building use.

RFC also developed a new identity distinct from BCF. A new logo, a new website, and an improved social media presence were introduced. The remaining members of BCF, the group that became RFC, began to gain enthusiasm and excitement about launching ourselves as Redeemer. There was a sense that on the September 9th launch day something altogether different was going to be introduced.

The worship team redesigned the order of worship following the recommendations of the launch team. We introduced a time for sharing testimonies, eliminated the announcements, and developed the response time at the end of the service to allow for more corporate prayer time. The praise team was retooled, adding new members to the team and setting into place a rotation between two teams with two distinct styles. The primary praise team would continue to be a contemporary and celebratory worship band. The secondary team would be mainly acoustic and introduce more modern hymns with a bluegrass flare.

The discipleship classes offered by the church also went through a season of restructuring. At 10am every Sunday morning BCF had been meeting for around forty-five minutes of Bible study. We developed this time to become discipleship training, viewing it as our primary means to develop and train leaders. We see those who attend this hour as the core of the church, so given our mission to make disciples we opted to use this time as an intentional training and equipping hour to facilitate our members to disciple each other and reach out to unbelievers. The Discipleship Hour was developed into a time for teaching our members both how and why we study the Bible and make disciples. A leader would facilitate discussion to be followed by a group discussion. Our youth and children also meet during this hour. Under the leadership of our children's pastor the RFC Children's Ministry was given a new name and a new logo. We

incorporated The Gospel Project[1] curriculum for our children and students.

In addition to setting into motion these changes at RFC, I also worked with the Launch Team to develop the plans for our launch service. We engaged the church members through the distribution of RFC t-shirts and invitation flyers. Two outreach events in the community were also developed in the new name of RFC. During the month of August we combined the Community Groups to allow them to work together to develop two outreach events. The first was a back to school pool party. We specifically targeted the families who had been coming to an afterschool program that one of our Community Groups has been coordinating. Close to 100 attended this community outreach event of which one third were un-churched. In addition to evangelism, a secondary benefit of this pool party was its effectiveness in building unity and enthusiasm between the members who would soon become RFC. We held a second event, a "Mini Olympics" in the city park, two weeks prior to the launch service. This event was well attended, with competitive games, a cook out, and prizes. During the "Mini-Olympics" there were opportunities to share the gospel with a number of un-churched families and extend an invitation to our launch service.

RFC Launch Service

On Sunday September 9, 2012, RFC was officially launched and the reconstituting of BCF was complete. There was about one hundred in attendance at the launch service. The large attendance encouraged the church greatly as they saw that in becoming two churches already BCF was reaching more people than at any other point in its history. I launched a new sermon series from the Gospel of Matthew, desiring it to be a series over a number of weeks sharing about the nature of the gospel and the church.

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[1]"The Gospel Project for Kids Training Manual" (Nashville: Lifeway, 2012), accessed on July 21, 2014, http://s3.amazonaws.com/TGPdownloads/kids/TGP_Training_Manual.pdf.

The worship space was set up differently than the previous week to add to the sense that this was the beginning of something altogether different.

We introduced the new elements to our worship service as the launch team had recommended. During the first few weeks of RFC I had a number of our members share testimonies from either their conversion or from their experience of accountability, fellowship, and outreach within the context of our community groups. At the end of the service we led the church into a time of corporate prayer, encouraging the congregation to use the time to pray with each other, as a family, or simply by themselves as they respond to the preaching of the word. Following the launch service we had a family picnic on the grounds of the BCF Building with rented inflatables and games for the children. Most who attended worship stayed for the picnic afterward, giving us an opportunity to connect with the new families who attended.

Alongside the launch of the RFC worship service we also launched six new Community Groups. Leaders and hosts were assigned with groups meeting on Sunday, Monday, Wednesday, and Friday nights. Our goal is for every member to be active in a community group. It is in the community group that members will receive care, accountability, and develop opportunities for evangelism within our city. Each group leader had chosen an evangelistic mission for his group and the church members were invited to join a group based on their availability or affinity toward a particular outreach project. One group developed a food pantry, another an after school program, one focused on providing support to the clients of a local crisis pregnancy center, another focused on a particular neighborhood, and the sixth group focused on ministry to the local elementary and middle school. These community groups are very much at the heart of our life together as a church so it was critical that they launch strong. I was greatly encouraged by the development of each group and the enthusiasm of each group leader.

Weeks 5-10: The Restructuring of BCF

Once BCF had reconstituted itself as two autonomous churches the work of restructuring BCF into the BCF Network begun. During weeks 5 to 10 my attention shifted to focus on reconstituting BCF as a resource-sharing network of churches. I assumed the role of Executive Director of the BCF Network and each member church appointed two of their elders to the BCF Leadership Council in accordance with our new bylaws. Our vision was for BCF to become an entity committed to supporting the work of planting churches by owning property and employing support staff to be available for our member churches to use. A church does not need to own a building to be a legitimate church. Most church planters are hindered by the high cost and unreliable nature of renting meeting space. The BCF Network seeks to accelerate our ability to plant churches by owning and making available a meeting space for our member churches to gather in. Furthermore, small churches and new churches might struggle to be able to afford the administrative staff and equipment needed to conduct operations. The BCF Network seeks to make office space, equipment, and administrative staff available to be used by our member churches. Church starts are often limited in their ability to commit funds to ministry and missions because their resources are tied up in essential overheads. The BCF Network seeks to pool resources in order that we might be in a position to develop international church planting partnerships, local community ministries, mission scholarships for church members, and a fund for local church planting. Finally, smaller churches and new church plants might find themselves lacking the ability to provide excellent youth and children events or the expertise to provide biblical training for their members on a host of issues. The BCF Network seeks to work together to host marriage enrichment events, financial stewardship seminars, evangelism training, as well as quality events for youth and children.

Once constituted, the BCF Network assumed ownership of the building and all its fixed and permanent contents. Each church agreed to give 30 percent of their

undesignated offering to the BCF Network in order to cover our shared expenses. These shared expenses included the mortgage payment, utilities, insurances, as well as office supplies, maintenance and administrative staff. In addition, each church contributed an additional 15 percent of undesignated income toward the BCF Network mission partnerships. This equitable approach to shared expenses meant that a new church, such as GFC, could survive on an average weekly income of $500 while having equal access to a fully equipped 10,000 square foot facility, support staff, mission scholarships and joint events. It would be inconceivable for a church the size of GFC to do so outside of the network.

Appointing Network Staff

The first step the newly appointed BCF Leadership Council took toward developing the network was to hire a BCF Office Manager. The person that served in this capacity would be critical to the development of BCF as a resource-sharing network. We felt the need to have one person on staff that worked specifically for the BCF Network. The Office Manager was appointed to coordinate the use of the facilities, maintain a calendar, and oversee the cleaning of the building. The Office Manager also took on responsibility for BCF financial obligations and internal accounts. The position opening was announced and applications were received from within the BCF member churches. Following an interview process a successful candidate was selected and approved with the consent of the BCF Leadership Council. The Office Manager has proven to be a critical position. All facility use requests, communication of activities, event scheduling, ordering of supplies, and maintenance of equipment goes through that office. The two churches are able to relate directly with the BCF Network as they work with the Office Manager.

One room in the BCF Building was designated as the BCF Network office. The Office Manager works from this space and the BCF Network office supplies and

copy equipment are stored in it. The Network Office serves as a resource room containing supplies available to both member churches.   As a member of the BCF Network, both RFC and GFC have been allocated one office for them to use for their individual church staff as well as the storage of their own church supplies.

In addition to the BCF network employing a staff, each church has appointed their own staff team. GFC employs Brad Woods as a bi-vocational pastor. As well as being the Executive Director of the BCF Network I also serve as the pastor of RFC alongside an Assistant Pastor. Although the pastoral staff of each church is appointed by, and accountable to their member churches the network provides human resource and payroll services to those staff members. The BCF Network is set up to function as the technical employer of all staff appointments in so far as it provides liability insurance coverage, workman's compensation insurance, employee benefits, and payroll processing services to the member churches and their staff.

BCF Network Leadership Council

Prior to launching the two new churches the members of BCF approved a new statement of faith and by-laws. These governing documents took affect at the point of reconstituting. The new by-laws governed how this network of churches would function and be led. Each church appoints its own elders and oversees their own members. The individual church joins the BCF Network voluntarily. The member church is an equal member of the partnership and has access to all shared resources including the building, its contents, and the support staff. The churches appoint two of their elders to serve on the BCF Network Leadership Council. This council is the governing board of the BCF Network. It approves the budget for the shared expenses, deliberates on matters related to the use and upkeep of facilities, approves mission partnerships, executes church planting goals, and appoints ministry directors to oversee the joint activities of the churches.

The first meeting of the BCF Network Leadership Council took place during week 5 of this project period, the week following the launch of RFC. At this point both churches were constituted, had members, and appointed elders to the BCF Network Leadership Council. The Leadership Council's first act was to affirm me in the position of Executive Director. In this capacity I serve as the administrative head of the network and provide leadership to our directors and staff. I also develop our vision for mission partnerships and church planting. My first formal act as BCF Network Executive Director was to make recommendations for the other director positions. The network by-laws require the appointment of three directors: Activities Director, Administrative Director and Missions Director.

The Activities Director oversees the joint activities of the churches. We understand that there are essential functions that the church must do such as worship, evangelism, and member care. There are also other good ministries that churches could do but are not essential. This would include such activities as the men and women's ministry groups, children camps, vacation Bible schools, seminars on financial planning, and so forth. The underlying principal that governs the work of the BCF Network is that the network exists to help provide the good but non-essential activities – therefore making the churches free to focus their attention on the essential work of a church. So the Activities Director of the BCF Network coordinates the joint events of the BCF Network Churches. Brad Woods, the pastor of GFC, was appointed to this position.

The Administrative Director is responsible for BCF Network budget, finances, and facilities. I invited Gary Osborne, an elder at RFC, to assume this role. Gary served in this capacity at BCF prior to the restructuring. The Office Manager and Administrative Director work very closely together in providing administrative leadership to the network. The Administrative Director makes decisions related to facilities and finance, such as repairs, maintenance and the purchase of new equipment.

The BCF Network exists to exalt God by making disciples of all nations. The Missions Director of the BCF Network has a critical role to play. He is tasked with developing our global mission partnerships and coordinating the response of our churches to the needs of our supported workers. Brian Taylor, a member of GFC, was appointed as the first person in this role. This team of four directors, as well as the Office Manager, provides coordination and leadership to our work together as churches.

During this second phase of the project period the BCF Leadership Team met to select and appoint these directors. In consultation with each individual director, specific goals and objectives were developed. In particular the Administrative Director and Office Manager worked closely with me during that time to develop the network financial and facility protocols.

Weeks 10-12: RFC Leadership Development

My initial focus during the project had been the appointment of the BCF Network leadership Team. During weeks 10 to 12, I committed time to develop the leadership of RFC. Prior to BCF becoming two churches I served alongside five other elders. We typically met twice a month. Now I found myself with only two other men serving alongside me as elders.

It became immediately obvious that elder meetings were going to be much different than when we were elders of BCF. All the matters related to facilities, major expenses, and non-essential activities had been moved under the oversight of the network. Elder meetings became much more focused. In the past we found ourselves spending a disproportionate amount of time discussing facility maintenance and budget shortfalls. Now, almost all of our time together is focused on the worship gathering, member care, counseling issues, leadership development, and prayer. This was a very refreshing experience for myself and the other two men who served alongside me as elders.

The leadership of RFC ministries needed to be rebuilt. The goal was to establish a team-based approach to ministry. We see in the New Testament a plurality of elders that provide spiritual oversight to the church. This is a core distinctive of RFC that is already in place. Although I was set aside by the church to be the primary preaching and teaching elder we affirm that each elder serves as co-pastor of the church. The vision for our church is for every member to be equipped and released into their disciple making ministries. This happens most readily within Community Groups as each member is afforded the opportunity to provide care and accountability to one another and to serve together to do evangelism within Bardstown.

In addition to our Elder Team and Community Group leaders we also formed a pastoral ministry team to provide leadership to the various ministry groups of the church. Specifically this would include the adult, student, and children's discipleship activities. One of the elders, Mike Lanway, agreed to serve as the head of that team. In doing so he has been tasked with building the team and developing a vision for discipleship within RFC. During this project phase, Mike Lanway began to meet weekly with the leaders of those ministries to coordinate and develop our work together. Following this time the leaders of these various ministries worked to develop our overall strategy for children, youth and adult discipleship.

Over the course of these three weeks I set to work on developing the ministry internship program at RFC. The leadership of BCFs recognizes the responsibility of the church to train ministers of the gospel. As such I feel strongly that the church must have a dedicated process by which we provide such training. Two college-aged students who are members of the church, David Carroll and Zach Lee, were appointed as pastoral interns. Both David Carroll and Zach Lee had been members of BCF for over a year prior to the restructuring. They had expressed a desire to pursue gospel ministry. Zach Lee, David Carroll and I began to meet weekly to discuss reading assignments I had set them as part of the internship program.   I set them the task of reading and leading a

weekly discussion related to Mark Dever's *The Deliberate Church*[2] and Greg Gilbert's

What Is The Gospel[3]. The interns were also given an opportunity to teach. David was

specifically providing support to the children and student ministries as we sought to

implement The Gospel Project curriculum. Zach Lee was given opportunity to preach as

I sought to train him to come onto the RFC Preaching Team. Together, the interns and I

would discuss, produce an outline for, and evaluate my weekly sermons. Each intern also

travelled with me to Nicaragua in October 2012, on a BCF Network mission trip. Zach

Lee and David Carroll were given teaching and leadership roles in the run up to and

during that trip. The development of this internship program will prove essential as BCF

moves to start new churches and seeks to provide leaders for those churches.

One final critical element of the restructuring of RFC was to introduce a

membership class within the first month of launching the church. I worked to develop a

New Members Handbook that outlined the RFC Covenant, BCF Statement of Faith, and

the RFC core values and polity. Within the first month we had twelve applicants to join

the church, bringing our membership close to the levels we had prior to restructuring. I

took the new members through the class and was encouraged by their enthusiasm and

excitement about the vision of BCF.

Weeks 13-15: Developing Network Goals

During weeks 13 to 15, the final phase of developing BCF into a property

sharing, church planting network took place. These final few weeks focused on building

the relationship between the two churches. I focused on developing our work together by

implementing three strategies. First, a leadership retreat in November for all the elders,

staff, and directors of the BCF Network. Second, the development of our global mission

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[2]Mark Dever and Paul Alexander, *The Deliberate Church: Building Your Ministry on the Gospel* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2005).

[3]Greg Gilbert, *What is the Gospel*? (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2011).

partnerships, including the launch of a new church planting initiative in Scotland named 20schemes and third, the planning, promotion, and launch of our joint events.

The Leadership Retreat

In November the six elders from both churches, along with the other BCF directors and staff spent two days at The Legacy Center at The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary for a leadership retreat. I had in mind three purposes for this retreat. The first was to reconnect the leadership groups from GFC and RFC who had up until this point been rightly focused upon establishing the individual churches. For BCF Network to thrive and survive there has to be mutual trust, respect, and appreciation between the pastors and elders of each member church. The second purpose was to evaluate the church planting process to see what we might do differently when it comes around to launching future churches as part of the BCF Network. Finally, we spent a significant amount of our time developing goals and objectives for our work together.

On the Friday night the only goal I had in mind was to pray, sing together, encourage one another from the Scriptures, and spend time fellowshipping. I deliberately did not plan any business for this first session. It was critical for us to come before the Lord in prayer and worship, and to share thoughts from the Scriptures with one another. I felt that we should commit to pray and worship until we all agreed it was time to conclude the evening. We met in Dillard Chapel, a small chapel within the Southern Seminary campus. Shawn Hughes and Brad Woods from GFC led us in a time of worship. We sung songs together, moved in and out of a time of spontaneous prayers, and occasionally an elder would voice a Scripture. It was a very powerful and moving experience that set the tone for the rest of our time together. A theme that seemed to rise to the service throughout the night was one of humility and sacrifice. The undercurrent that fuels much of what led us to move BCF in this direction was one of selflessness and

mutual sacrifice. This worship experience was followed by a meal together and a time of fellowship with one another. It was a strong start to the weekend.

On Saturday we started early with a time of evaluation. I simply asked the men gathered to consider what lessons we can learn as we look back through this season of restructuring. There were a number of very helpful observations. Following a lengthy discussion on both the process and the result it was agreed that we have ended up exactly where we desired to get to despite the struggles along the way. We each agreed that there were some things that could have been done differently. For example, it was felt that the manner in which we invited each member to decide which church they wanted to be a part of proved to be difficult for some in the church. Unwittingly we put every member in a state of unease, with no one truly knowing what kind of church they might end up being a part of. Instead, we felt it would be preferable for us to have been more deliberate in our approach. Rather than extending an open invitation, the elders should have been more proactive in identifying those that are best suited to be a part of the new work and encourage them to think about joining it.

During our afternoon session we spent our time talking about our work together. The bulk of our time was focused on discussing our core values related to mission partnerships. I had just begun developing a partnership between BCF and Niddrie Community Church in order to plant and revitalize churches in Scotland's poorest communities. I took the time to introduce the BCF leadership to Mez McConnell, the pastor of Niddrie Community Church, and share our vision for this new work. It was agreed to begin a process of evaluating our current mission partnerships to determine if they still fit within the framework of our values. Brian Taylor, the Mission's Director, was tasked with spending the next year to develop a relationship with our existing partners in order to determine how we can best support them. Currently BCF supports church planting in Toledo, Nicaragua, Scotland and Guinea. We also give financially to the Southern Baptist Convention Cooperative Program, the Nelson Baptist

Association, and a local family resource and counseling center called The New Life Center.

Finally, we spent our last hour at the retreat discussing our life together as churches. We discussed a number of issues with the building that need to be addressed. Gary Obsorne, the Administration Director, led that discussion and together the team developed a working list of facility work projects. Brad Woods, the Activities Director, led in a dialogue about child protection issues and assigned the task of developing this to RFC's Children's Pastor. We discussed the upcoming calendar including plans for a joint Christmas Eve worship service. In addition to this we spent time together developing a vision for our joint activities such as future mission trips, VBS, children and youth camps and mid week seminars.

The leadership retreat proved to be a very significant mile marker as it gave us time to pause and reflect upon where we have come to following a lengthy and at time difficult time of transition. It was also a moment to look ahead at where we are going together as two churches. In the busyness of launching BCF as two new churches it was good to take some time to think strategically about our work together. I intend to repeat this leadership retreat every year to give us an opportunity as elders, directors, and staff to evaluate and plan our work together.

BCF Mission Partnerships

Aside from sharing a building and providing resources to church plants the benefit of developing the BCF Network will be most strongly felt when it comes to our global mission partnerships. BCF has always had a very strong focus on international missions. As well as being a committed contributor to the Southern Baptist Convention and our local Baptist Association, BCF has also had a strong commitment to international missions. Many of our members have been overseas on a BCF mission trip. Part of our motivation for developing a property sharing network has been to free up resources and

funds to be used to make disciples internationally. These funds might otherwise have been needed to put into building a larger facility or growing the staff in order to accommodate growth if we remained one single church. The current BCF Network budget commits 15 percent of all undesignated income from both churches to be used toward global disciple making. As the network grows the dollar amount that is released for missions will increase significantly.

There were two key developments related to our mission partnerships that transpired during the course of the first few months of the BCF Network. The first was the inaugural BCF Network mission trip. A team of 12 went to Managua, Nicaragua, in October. As the churches give toward the shared mission expenses of the BCF Network a scholarship fund is made available to all members of any BCF Network Church joining a BCF Mission Team. The BCF Network is able to provide a scholarship fund that can cover up to half the cost of a mission trip.

The Nicaragua mission team included Brian Taylor, the BCF Missions Director, and myself. BCF has had a longstanding relationship with Ricardo Hernandez, a pastor in Managua, on this trip he had arranged for us to work with a church plant in a community called Los Brasilles. The trip to Nicaragua was the first time that we went as two churches coming together to develop a common partnership. That fact was most acutely appreciated when we returned and the team shared at both churches testimonies of our time together.

The second very significant development related to our mission partnerships has been the founding of a new ministry organization called 20schemes. As previously mentioned, Mez McConnell is the pastor of Niddrie Community Church in Edinburgh, Scotland. McConnell and I first met in September of 2011 and I visited him and the elders of Niddrie Community Church in the summer of 2012. During that time Mez McConnell shared about his work to revitalize a struggling church in a very poor neighborhood in Scotland, known as a housing scheme. I am from Scotland and first

moved to the states with the goal of returning to Scotland to plant a church there. BCF

has long had an involvement in strengthening local churches within Scotland. I was very

interested in Mez McConnell's work and impressed with the commitment he had to

mentor and train young men and women from Scotland's schemes for ministry. Together

Mez McConnell and I began to develop a working relationship with the goal of

establishing a ministry that seeks to build healthy gospel preaching churches in

Scotland's poorest communities. In October of 2012 we launched 20schemes. Our goal

is to revitalize or plant gospel preaching churches with the support of missionaries who

we desire to recruit, train, and send into Scotland's schemes.

During the final phase of this project period, 20schemes was incorporated in

the USA as an integrated auxiliary of the BCF Network. The BCF Leadership Council

serves as the governing board of directors for 20schemes Incorporated. As the Executive

Director of the BCF Network I also function as the Executive Director of 20schemes.

Brian Taylor, the BCF Missions Director, came on staff with 20schemes as the Office

Manager. I travelled to Scotland to preach at Niddrie Community Church at the end of

October in order to launch the ministry in Scotland and to strengthen the relationship

between BCF and Niddrie Community Church. We made plans at that point for Mez

McConnell to travel to Kentucky to meet with the elders of both RFC and GFC and be

introduced to our members.

I believe that the development of this strategic partnership, the investment BCF

is prepared to make into it, and the freedom I have been given to commit time and energy

to developing its work in the USA would not have been possible if we had not moved

forward with the restructuring of BCF. We have a clear and determined focus, to exalt

God through making disciples of all nations. We do this through church planting. I lead

a strong pastoral ministry team at RFC that has served to free me up in order that I

develop the work of our network. If I were the senior pastor of a single growing church

with growing needs, facility constraints, expanding ministries and so forth then I would

need to pull back from any personal involvement in our mission partnerships. Instead, this model has enabled me to move forward in the development of 20schemes with more intensity.

BCF Network Activities

The final phase of the project period involved the development of our work together as two churches. Initially when Brad Woods and I first began planning the ways in which the two churches can support each other by working together we had a very structured plan in mind. Our first thought was to have regular seminars, utilizing the various teachers from each church, to provide classes and training for our members on such topics as financial stewardship, evangelism training, small group leader training, parenting classes, and so forth. We had thought about having a regular time for the network to host such seminars and to invite members of both churches to attend. However, Brad Woods was concerned that we not crowd our church calendars with activities too soon. Instead, we developed a very modest approach to developing joint activities together.

It was agreed that the BCF Network would host a joint Christmas Eve and Good Friday service. During the final week of the project Brad Woods and I began to work on planning the Christmas Eve gathering. We also scheduled a marriage seminar in February led by Barry and Sheri McGuffin from GFC, to be followed by a financial stewardship class led by Mike Lanway of RFC. We agreed to evaluate the effectiveness of these joint activities in Spring 2013 in order to determine how best to use our time together in the future. While I was eager to press for more joint activities in order to build our common identity as a means to drive forward our church planting and missions goals, I nevertheless came to accept the caution of Brad Woods and was happy to move forward as he proposed with this modest schedule.

Conclusion

The overall goal of this project has been to transition BCF from being a single church into a network of churches committed to share and make available resources such as property, people, and funding so that we might be best equipped for the mission of making disciples of all nations. Much work took place during this project time frame to accomplish that goal. Two churches were launched. The leadership of those two churches was developed. The relationship between the churches was established. The logistics of a church network were put into place. At the end of the time frame GFC and RFC were well positioned as distinct churches each with a clear understanding of their individual identity and mission as a local church. Furthermore, the BCF Network had taken a significant step toward establishing itself as a resource to those churches and a catalyst for strengthening them in order that they might partner together to make disciples in Bardstown and overseas.

CHAPTER 5

PROJECT EVALUATION

Bardstown Christian Fellowship has undergone a far-reaching transformation. Prior to this project period, BCF was a single congregation, meeting in a single building, with a single church leadership. At the conclusion of the project, BCF is now a network with two member churches, Redeemer Fellowship Church and Grace Fellowship Church, working together to share resources in order to plant churches locally and internationally. It is clear that the primary objective has therefore been accomplished. Nevertheless, a number of lessons have been observed, to better equip BCF to plant again, and to best serve other churches that might consider making a similar transition.

In 2011, the elders of BCF presented a proposal to the church members to reform the church into a network of churches that meet at different times while sharing the same property. The decision to do so was motivated, in part, by two objectives. First, the church was motivated by a desire to continue to grow evangelistically within Bardstown without having to increase expenditure on property. Second, the church was motivated by a desire to maintain a healthy church ecclesiology based on the principle that the New Testament *ecclesia* is a duly ordered assembly of people that regular assemble together at one time and in one place for the purpose of publicly worshipping Jesus Christ. The following will assess the extent to which this transition has served to fulfill those two objectives.

Purpose

In July 2014, it was possible to assess if the project fulfilled the stated purpose. Two years on from the project date the two churches remain viable and autonomous

churches. Furthermore, the BCF Network is functioning as a network of churches, overseeing and maintaining property and other assets. Functionally, the purpose of creating a property sharing church planting network has been accomplished.   It is necessary, though, to probe deeper to determine if the goals of growing evangelistically, sharing resources, and maintaining a healthy church ecclesiology have been accomplished.

Neither RFC nor GFC have experienced explosive growth over the past two years, but both churches have grown at a pace faster than BCF grew prior to the transition. RFC launched with fifty-two members. Since the launch, seventeen people have joined the church. In August 2014, the average Sunday morning attendance fluctuates around one hundred (adults and children). GFC launched with eighteen members and today has thirty. The Core Group that started GFC totaled thirty-five adults and children. Today the number of regular attendees at GFC is around fifty. In two years, RFC has managed to replace the membership that was sent out to form GFC. During the same period, GFC has increased in size.

RFC launched with three elders. Two years on from that launch RFC has six elders, the church managed to reproduce their leaders. Every ministry team of RFC has experienced an injection of fresh faces and new energy. The staff team is comprised of a full-time Lead Pastor, plus two part-time positions, including an Associate Pastor and a Pastoral Assistant. The Lead Pastor also functions as Executive Director of the BCF Network and 20schemes.   While the Lead Pastor is funded fully by the members of RFC, he functions bi-vocationally, with his time divided between these three ministries. The staff team serves to coordinate the day-to-day operations and weekly ministries of the church. The Associate Pastor provides pastoral support to members, follows up with first-time guests and coordinates the adult discipleship activities. The Pastoral Assistant provides financial and administrative support to the church ministry teams.   Far from

leaving the church weaker, the re-launch of the church and the establishment of the BCF Network has re-energized and re-focused the church, making it stronger.

The shift in ownership of the property has changed the attitude of the congregation toward the use of the facility. The church is now a tenant using a shared space. Congregational meetings are no longer focused on facility maintenance or repair issues. Matters related to equipment purchases and upkeep does not need to be discussed at the congregational level. In fact, over the past two years, there has been no discussion at all during congregational or elder meetings related to the maintenance and upkeep of the property or equipment. Prior to the transition the attention of the church was disproportionately focused on the maintenance of the property. It was easy for the congregation to lose focus on the mission of making disciples because of distractions related to managing and funding a property.

As part of the BCF Network, RFC pays a fixed amount of 30 percent of undesignated funds to cover the cost of facilities, equipment and support staff. Therefore, it is not necessary to have discussions at the elder or congregational level about what money needs to be allocated each week toward the cost of running the property. The BCF Network serves the member churches by providing a maintained, secured, clean, and functioning property. Not only does the BCF Network provide a space for the church to meet, but it also provides audio and visual equipment, seating, staging, children's classroom furnishings, hospitality supplies, copier and printing services, as well as use of a van and trailer. There is, therefore, a built-in cap on the amount of money that the church commits to these areas. The church knows that on any given Sunday, 70 percent of the money received through undesignated gifts will go toward the mission and ministry of the church to make disciples.

As a church plant, GFC has seen an immediate benefit from this arrangement. Typically, a church planter would be required to secure funding, often from partner agencies and outside sources, in order to secure a lease agreement on a property and

purchase the necessary equipment to launch a public worship gathering. If BCF had opted to plant GFC at a secondary location, at a school or a hotel for example, significant funding would need to be raised. In addition to paying rent, the church would need to purchase chairs, sound equipment, projection devices, children, hospitality supplies, plus any other items necessary for a weekly gathering. Prior to purchasing the current building, BCF was meeting at a Middle School and rented a downtown office. The lease payment for renting the school plus janitorial services cost BCF upward of $500 a week in 2010. This does not include the cost of purchasing sound and projection equipment, as well as other necessary supplies. Starting a new church is not cheap. Just a lease on a weekly meeting space would cost GFC $26,000 a year.

GFC is not a wealthy church. The church has been very effective at reaching a poorer demographic in Bardstown. Many of the individuals who joined GFC since the church started have come from an un-churched background. The church is comprised of a number of single parent households, working hard at a minimum wage job, and a high proportion are living on state and/or federal assistance. The weekly offering from this group can fluctuate anywhere from $300 to $1000. It is difficult to imagine a circumstance in which GFC could continue to survive in its current form if it were not a part of the BCF Network. The church membership knows that each week no more than 30 percent of the church income will be required to cover the cost of a weekly worship gathering. Regardless of a church offering being $300 or $3000, the 30 percent required for shared expenses remains constant. There have been some weeks where the church has only paid $100 to the network. The church leadership does not feel the stress of having to pay bills or keep an unfriendly landlord happy. There is consistency week to week. GFC knows that for as long as they remain part of the BCF Network, they will have a place to meet that is clean, secured, and well-maintained – no matter how low their weekly offering might be. The viability of the church is not dependent on the financial position of the church. The benefit of shared expenses means that the network

as a whole absorbs the pressure that would otherwise have proven difficult for GFC to bear.

RFC has benefited from new leadership, a renewed sense of purpose, and a clearer focus on missional objectives. This has resulted in a steady but consistent growth over the past two years. Meanwhile, GFC has benefited from the security and stability of being part of a property-sharing network, building on an established legal, financial, and administrative framework, as well as making use of equipment that a new church of their size would be unable to afford. This has spared the leadership of GFC from experiencing much of the pressure related to finances and administrative oversight that many new churches experience. Together, both churches have supported one another by sharing expenses as well as making available the experience and skills of one another's members.

BCF addresses the potential downside to church planting. In some cases, church planting stunts the growth of the mother church as critical leaders are removed from it. At the same time the new church is weak from the very beginning due to a lack of resources. The BCF Network model has demonstrated that it can address these problems. The sending church still has access to the experience and skills of members that have been sent out. There is not a significant financial cost to planting in this manner, as the same number of members remains responsible for the financial obligations. Planting on-site does not significantly increase the financial obligations. In fact, by planting a church on-site there are now two growing churches meeting the same financial burdens that were previously the responsibility of one congregation. There is a net financial benefit from on-site planting for both the sending church and the new church start.

Networking together to share resources has also greatly benefitted the ability of the churches to invest in reaching the nations. While avoiding the unnecessary duplication of resources, the churches have significantly freed up money for missions. Two worship locations with all the necessary equipment and supplies would have cost a

significant amount of money that could otherwise be spent on fulfilling the mission of the church. Instead, the two churches commit 10 percent of their undesignated weekly giving to the BCF Network Global Outreach Fund. The fund is used to support BCF mission partnerships. Collectively, the two churches are able to support church planting in Scotland through the work of 20schemes, a church plant in Toledo, a biblical counseling ministry in Bardstown, church planting in Guinea, as well as a scholarship fund for members of BCF churches to travel as part of a short-term mission team. A small church plant would struggle to commit to support missions in the manner that GFC has done within their first two years.

Since the establishment of the BCF Network, fifty BCF Global Outreach Scholarships have been issued to help fund members on short-term mission trips to our partners in Scotland, Toledo, and Nicaragua. Members of RFC and GFC have equal access to the scholarship fund. Receipt of the scholarship can pay up to 50 percent of the cost of a mission trip. Most members of both churches are unable to afford to cover their own expenses on such trips, but they might be gifted and able to participate. The scholarship fund has proven to be invaluable in making it possible for all BCF members to be able to participate with a ministry in an international context.

Goals

Five goals were established at the outset of this project. The following will examine the extent to which these project goals were met.

Create a Network Leadership Team

The first goal was the creation of a leadership team to provide direction and oversight to the BCF Network. At the conclusion of the project period, a functioning team was in place. A leadership council of elders was formed and had completed a number of meetings. The two churches each appointed two elders to serve on this team. That team began to comprehend their role in the capacity as leaders of a church-planting

network. The role of the team member had to be viewed as being distinct from their role as elders in their respective churches. It is one thing to appoint and create such a team; it is an altogether harder task to ensure that team functions productively. It proved to be a struggle for the Leadership Council of the BCF Network to function as anticipated.

The four elders and the Executive Director met to form the Leadership Council of BCF, but they struggled to fully embrace this new role. Both GFC and RFC were going through an intensive time of restructuring. There was much work to be done as elders of the two churches. These men did not view the work of developing the new network as a priority. Furthermore, the four elders were adapting to the new reality that they are no longer members of the same church. These men were not adequately prepared for this new relational dynamic. Both groups of elders felt wounded in part. Church planting is painful. The sending church feels the pain of fewer members and a sense of loss from the families leaving to start the new work. The new church feels weary at the weight of starting everything over. There are so many demands on a new church that it can be draining for the leaders and members of that congregation. Starting new Community Groups, building a praise team, developing a children's ministry and so many other demands feel immediately pressing. The elders of GFC were feeling weary in the face of these tasks. The elders of RFC were experiencing a sense of loss. No one truly felt a sense of urgency about the task of building the network, and yet the work was urgent in order for the network to survive and thrive.

The elders not only underestimated the difficulty that would come with focusing on these new roles, they also underestimated the strain it would place on their personal relationships with one another. Prior to the transition, the six elders were members of the same church. They met often as elders of the same church. They were accustomed to shepherding one another. When a family leaves a church there is always a sense of loss. When someone leaves a church the relationship between the members and the former member unavoidably alters. These six men had a close bond and mutual trust.

The severing of the group into two independent groups of elders altered greatly their personal relationships. While it was a joyful task to start a new church, it was nonetheless a painful one. The six men struggled to adapt to the new relationship and to understand the nature of their new friendship. When the men got together as a Leadership Team of BCF, there were residual hurt feelings and mistrust from the planting process. That process hurt the interpersonal relationships between these men. There was not adequate focus given to rebuilding those relationships.

Implement an Administrative Plan

The second goal of the project was the development of an administrative plan for the network. As BCF transitioned from being a single church into a network of churches, attention was given to creating administrative structure for this new organization. Financial processes were established during the project period. The BCF Network established requirements that member churches provide 30 percent of their undesignated offering toward the cost of network overheads. The churches are required to provide an additional 10 percent toward BCF Global Outreach partners. Furthermore, BCF has been set up to function as the employer of all church staff. A plan needed to be established for the processing of payroll and employee benefits.

At the end of the project period, clear processes were set in motion. Both member churches began the process of preparing weekly payments to the network for shared expenses and mission giving. The BCF Office Manager along with the Administrative Director established an internal accounting system. The Office Manager was tasked with ensuring bills were paid in a timely manner and church contributions were being routinely deposited. In the event that a church fails to make payment, then the Office Manager is tasked with securing that payment from the church that had fallen into arrears. The Office Manager also set in place a reporting mechanism by which the

church treasurers report their weekly giving totals to ensure the 40 percent contribution is being accurately recorded.

Payroll processing had been established. To assist the churches, the BCF Network provides payroll services for all staff of the member churches. While the church appoints and oversees their own staff, the staff function as employees of the network. A system was established whereby BCF pays the staff salary, payroll taxes, and benefits. The individual churches reimburse the network for those payments. By the end of the project period both churches were operating successfully under this arrangement.

In addition to the churches employing staff, the network has employed its own staff members. At the outset of the project period, Krista Juberg was appointed BCF Network Office Manager. Not long after the establishment of the network, the Leadership Council recognized the need for a Facilities Manager to oversee the upkeep of the building and equipment. The position was advertised in both churches and the Administrative Director was given responsibility for filling the position. The successful applicant is a member of GFC. The Executive Director ultimately supervises the network staff with day-to-day operational oversight provided by the Administrative Director. At the end of the project period employees were in place and functioning well in their new roles.

One final aspect of developing an administrative plan was the establishment of building use protocols. By the end of the project period these protocols were established. Any church has the option to reserve use of the facilities but all requests must be submitted to the Office Manager and placed on the Facility Use Calendar. RFC has automatic use of the building until 2pm on a Sunday. GFC has use of the facility from 2pm onward. Both churches are instructed to leave the church clean with the option of leaving the chairs, staging and other areas set up as they use them. The other church will set up for their use once they arrive on the premises. By the end of the project period both churches had become familiar with and accustomed to these arrangements. Any

issues that a church has with the condition of the building are to be raised with the Administrative Director. The establishment of these arrangements has been satisfactorily implemented.

Develop Ministry Objectives

The third goal of the project was the development of ministry objectives for the BCF Network. The BCF Leadership Retreat proved to be a pivotal event for the fulfillment of the project goals and purposes. It was during that retreat that the leadership of the network began to fully grasp the potential for our partnership together beyond common ownership of building and equipment.

First, the network church planting methodology was discussed. Church multiplication must remain a prominent focus of the churches. It would be easy to lose sight of this overarching goal of the network. The Leadership Retreat was the first opportunity to discuss a strategy for accomplishing this goal. During that retreat, it was established that both churches are to be in a position to mutually support any new church plant before the network proceeds with planting a third church. Although it was observed that, while the support is mutual, it does not need to be equitable. RFC might well be positioned to send more members than GFC. The possibility of the third church worshipping on a Saturday night was voiced. Alternatively, a third church might consider the option of a mid-week worship gathering, with Sundays set apart as a time for Community Groups to gather in homes. It was agreed to consider the timing of developing the third church plant at a future Leadership Retreat.

A second objective of the network has been the development of global mission partnerships. The establishment of 20schemes as an integrated auxiliary of the BCF Network was ambitious, yet has proven to be a critical aspect of the development of the network. As a mission society, 20schemes functions as an auxiliary member of the network, with oversight being given to it by a sub-group of elders. The administrative

head of 20schemes is the BCF Executive Director. The development of the network as a church-planting mission served to give clear focus and direction to the mission works of BCF in Scotland, subsequently leading to the establishment of 20schemes. The rapid growth of this ministry was not predicted. Currently, twenty other churches partner with the BCF Network to financially support the work in Scotland. A staff and administrative structure was established to manage the organization, sixteen individuals have been appointed as 20schemes missionaries, and a number of individuals have served as interns or short-term mission team members. It is difficult to consider how a small church could sustain and effectively manage such an ambitious international missions objective, yet as a partnership of churches the BCF Network was well placed to do just that.

A final aspect of implementing the ministry objectives is the development of joint activities of the network. At the outset of the project, it was envisioned that the network would coordinate and run what were considered good, but non-essential, activities of the church. The example of youth activities, women's groups, men's Bible studies and Vacation Bible Schools were given. However, this proved difficult to implement. Naturally, both churches developed their own aspirations in these areas, and it was not the intention of the network to prevent a church from doing so. Therefore, GFC felt it necessary to begin a Grace Women's Group and a Grace Youth Group. When BCF attempted a midweek youth meeting, it was led by a member of RFC and only attended by youth from RFC. Under the direction of the Activities Director and with the consent of the Leadership Council, it was agreed to focus less on weekly network activities, but more on ad hoc events such as an annual Children's Camp, Youth Retreat, Marriage Enrichment Seminar and Family Worship experiences. That different approach has proven an effective shift in strategy.

Finally, in addition to these ad hoc activities of the network, a schedule of joint worship gatherings was also agreed to. For the network to thrive, the members of the churches must be able to know, support, and trust one another. Times when the two

churches gather together for a joint event are critical to cultivate such an attitude of mutual trust and appreciation between the two churches. Therefore, it was agreed to host a BCF Christmas Eve service, a Good Friday service and an Annual Meeting of the network to share testimonies about the work the churches do together. The first Christmas Eve service was held shortly after the culmination of the project period, and proved a success with good attendance and participation coming from both member churches.

Educate Members about the Network

A fourth goal for this project is to educate the members of network churches about the purpose and goals of the BCF Network. Educating the members has proven to be a more timely process than initially anticipated. The two churches spent much of the project period establishing their own sense of identity and purpose within the network. Therefore, it proved difficult to clearly communicate the purpose of and need for the BCF Network. Over time it has been less difficult to share that message.

BCF has created a website which shares the vision and purpose of the network. Signage throughout the building also serves to remind attendees of both churches that they are a part of something bigger than a single church. Social media platforms have been used to highlight the work of the network, most notably during mission trips. The joint worship gatherings have proven to be a critical opportunity to stress the purpose for, and results of, the work of the churches partnering together. Each church uses New Member Classes and quarterly Member's Meetings to remind their members about the purpose of the network. During the New Member's Class, the BCF Statement of Faith is presented and the dynamics of the BCF Network is explained. At regular church Member's Meetings, a BCF Network report is given, with particular emphasis given to our mission partnerships. At the start of each week, an email is distributed to the

members and regular attendees of both churches that include announcements about the work of BCF as well as updates from each church.

Develop Personal Coaching Skills

The fourth project goal was related to personal development. As I moved into the role of Executive Director of a Church Planting network, I was committed to using this period to grow in my leadership abilities. I focused on three primary areas of personal growth. First, I sought leadership coaching from key pastors who I knew and respected. Second, I personally sought to invest in men who I am training to become leaders of the local church. Finally, I read resources related to the topic for personal enrichment.

I am part of a network of pastors that meets six times a year to coach one another. Participation in that network has proved a critical part of my personal development. This group of twelve pastors serves at a number of churches of various sizes and stages of ministry. It has been helpful for me not only to participate in the regular conference call, and on occasion to lead a discussion on a matter related to the ministry context in Bardstown, but these men have also become a resource for me, often replying to my emails or responding to requests to speak on the phone about a certain matter. I have learned a great deal from these men as they model to me humility, love, and leadership.

The coaching network has served to develop my vision for training and coaching young men for gospel ministry. During the course of the project, I was able to meet weekly with Zach Lee and David Carroll on a regular basis to discuss issues related to church health, leadership, and preaching. I thoroughly enjoyed these meetings; they have served to give me a greater passion for investing my time in this work. A great

resource that helped me develop in this area is *Gospel Coach: Shepherding Leaders to Glorify God* by Scott Thomas and Tom Wood[1].

Strengths

When considering the transformation that BCF went through during the course of this project, it is apparent that there are a number of areas where BCF is stronger today than it was before. The creation of two churches out of one church has strengthened the fellowship of both churches. As a church grows bigger and adds more members, there are often a growing number of church members that are attendees but not full participants in the life of the church. A church can reach a size when the elders do not know the names of, or the concerns of each member. Pastoral care and oversight becomes de-personalized, often being farmed out from the elders to a sub-set of leaders. The preaching pastor is no longer preaching to a congregation he is personally familiar with. The strength of the transition BCF experienced is that BCF is now positioned to continue to experience growth, adding new members and baptizing new believers, while at the same time maintaining the close personal relationship between members and between the elders and the church. The idea of growth by multiplication rather than by addition has reaped significant benefits for each individual member who still receives care, support and accountability from their church family.

The value of partnership has been imbedded in the life of BCF. Churches do not exist in a vacuum, but as members of the network they thrive and survive as the partnership thrives and survives. The health of one church benefits the health of the other church. Likewise, when one church struggles, it is imperative that the other church steps up to provide support and assistance because of the interdependence that exists between them. When both churches grow and thrive, then it benefits the network as a whole,

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[1]Scott Thomas and Tom Wood, *Gospel Coach: Shepherding Leaders to Glorify God* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2012).

making available more resources for the work of making disciples in Bardstown and across the world. It is rare to find this kind of symbiotic partnership between churches. The network remains a voluntary association of independent churches, but it is a strong, interdependent, mutually beneficial partnership. Church members grasp this sense of being a part of something bigger. BCF is not just two small churches meeting in the same building; rather it is a family of churches seeking to hold everything in common in order to best fulfill our mission of making disciples.

The transition has also been helpful in shifting the attitude of church members toward property. Whereas before, the church owned the building and property, now the network is the owner, and the churches have equal access to the shared property. Therefore, the church does not develop any sense of identify from where they meet. The building does not define the church or dictate the activities of the congregation. The church does not exist to fund the building; rather the building exists to serve the churches. Spending money on a new building in order to accommodate growth would have become a major distraction for the church and tied up money unnecessarily. Instead, the transition saw the members of BCF re-focus on evangelism and disciple-making. Indeed, it has been interesting to note the reaction of the community to the move. Whenever I speak to a member of another church about what BCF did, I am met with puzzlement and confusion. Many cannot understand why a church would chose to divide itself like this, or even more confusing is why a church would give up ownership of a building. However, others who do not come from a church background actually have expressed that the number of visible church buildings in a particular community discredits the witness of the church. There is not a need for more money to be spent on church buildings in Bardstown. There is ample space for Christians to meet. That does not mean that there is not a need for more healthy churches in Bardstown.

A significant but unforeseen strength of this transition has been the shifting demographic of the BCF Network. Bardstown as a community is divided between

educated, professional, middle class families, low-income households of shift workers, as well as a sizeable number who are trapped in a lifestyle of addiction and drug abuse.

As a network, our community mission focus has been to provide a gospel-centered response to the problems of poverty in our county. In 2005, Bardstown Christian Fellowship partnered with others in the community to start The New Life Center as a resource and counseling center for those in crisis. One of the elders of GFC serves as Executive Director of Bethany Haven, the local emergency shelter for women in crisis. A member of RFC started an afterschool ministry to provide tutoring assistance to children in crisis. Many members from RFC and GFC have joined the church after first connecting with the gospel through one of these ministries. A high number of families in both churches are single parent family, non-professional, low-income households. The creation of the BCF Network not only provides funding for these ministries to support such families, but also provides an affordable and sustainable structure within which churches can grow and flourish without needing a full time staff or large budget.

In light of the strengths derived from this transition, it is possible to note a number of exciting opportunities that lie ahead for the BCF Network. The end goal is not to start one new church in the same facility, but to maximize the use of the property. As the churches grow, new members are added and new leaders are developed, then a third church will be planted on-site. It is possible that two more churches could meet in the same building as part of the BCF Network. Saturday night is available for a third church plant. Bardstown is a Catholic community and a number of families are accustomed to viewing five o'clock on Saturday as a time of worship. Other churches in Louisville have experienced some success with Saturday night worship. There also remains the option of a church meeting in homes on Sunday mornings and again corporately on a Wednesday night for a worship gathering. That mid-week option will be particularly effective at reaching Spanish-speakers who struggle to meet during the weekends due to work

commitments. There are great opportunities for reaching Bardstown as four distinct churches, with distinct identities and personalities, distinct leadership teams, meeting at different times, and reaching different groups of people within the city. Yet this group of four churches, probably smaller churches of no more than one hundred members in each congregation, will be bound together in a strong and mutually encouraging partnership. I am convinced that 400 people gathering together in four individual churches will be more effective in making strong disciples of Christ than one church of 400. Furthermore, this is an inexpensive and quickly reproducible means of church planting. It would take considerably more money and time to start four churches separate from the network.

Weaknesses

As with any plan, there are a number of weaknesses that need to be taken into consideration when evaluating the BCF Network project. Throughout the course of the transition, three areas created a point of tension that needed to be addressed quickly. First, we were confronted with the problem of a member of one church seeking to attend and join the other church in the network. The leadership of both churches stressed from the beginning that while all members are welcome to attend either church if they chose. Both churches are healthy and gospel preaching churches so a member attending more than one is not inappropriate.   However, every member must commit fully to one church and remain committed to it. It will not be possible for a member to move their membership from one BCF church to the other without just cause and the affirmation of the elders. There are occasions that it might be wise for a person to be sent from one church to the other; maybe in order to support a ministry in the other church, or due to a 'life change', making attendance at one of the churches no longer possible. Indeed, in such instances, the member should be encouraged to join the other network church. However, given the relational proximity of the two churches, it is very likely that a member might simply choose to join the other church due to matter of preference or

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personal grievance. BCF was hit by this exact situation early on in the transition when a member of RFC left the church due to a personal grievance, and sought to join GFC. A joint meeting was held between the elders of both churches to discuss the situation. The situation eventually resulted in RFC accepting the member's resignation and sending him on to GFC. Without a spirit of humility and a focus on the health of the relationship between the member churches, it is easy to see how such a circumstance could prove destructive.

The relationship between the leaders of both churches is critical to the survivability of the network, that fact was gravely underestimated during the course of the transition. The relationship between the elders of GFC and RFC became strained early on, but was not quickly addressed; this was a major failing on my part. There were many assumptions and misunderstandings that were allowed to fester, and ultimately caused a breakdown in the personal relationship between the pastors of GFC and myself. I felt grieved by their failure to involve me in the work of planting GFC, and felt shut out from what I had hoped was something we would do together. The elders of GFC in turn felt that I was not interested in the needs and concerns of their church, and had a difficult time distinguishing between my role as pastor of RFC and network director. They perceived that I had become too focused on the work of developing the network and 20schemes, and was dismissive of their needs as a struggling church plant. We eventually met and dealt head on with all these issues in what was a difficult and personally painful season in the life of BCF, but one in which I learned a great deal about myself and my leadership style. I am very grateful that we were able to have an open and frank conversation. At the conclusion of that season, we were able to continue to love and cherish one another – it would appear that our relationship is now much stronger than it was prior those conversations. It is clear now that facing this breakdown in relationship early on only served to make us stronger and more resilient for the future. Our determination to make it work was evident.

A further area of weakness that needed to be addressed quickly was the lack of transparency between the two churches. It did not take long for both churches to drift apart relationally. A few months into the transition, most members of GFC had no relational connection to members of RFC because they were not a part of BCF prior to the transition. Furthermore, members of RFC began to feel increasingly estranged from members of GFC. The churches began to misinterpret one another, which ultimately allowed a potentially devastating spirit of mistrust to develop. When the BCF Network Administrative Director made a decision to re-arrange the rooms used as BCF offices in order to make room for a nursery, some at GFC distrusted the move, thinking it was done to benefit RFC. Likewise, when a lock appeared on the door of the GFC Kid's Supply Cabinet it was perceived by some members of RFC as a sign that they did not trust them. While seemingly unjustified, these examples serve as a reminder of how cautious we have to be to ensure the leadership remains transparent and clear about any matter related to the set up and use of the building.

These weaknesses serve to alert the BCF Network to a number of threats. The network needs to remain vigilant to build and develop interpersonal relationships between the leadership of both churches. In particular, the pastors of the member churches must make an effort to share with each other often, pray together on occasion and develop a close bond of mutual trust and respect. The two churches also need to redouble their efforts to stress the importance of this partnership, and speak positively and publicly on behalf of the other church. The practice of praying often for each other during our worship gatherings helps to avert this threat. Likewise, members of one church stepping up to meet a need at the other church on occasion supports this objective. For example, members of RFC recently provided childcare during a GFC member's meeting. That simple act of serving one another will pay great dividends in protecting the network.

Potential Improvements

There are a number of final observations to note that would have improved the transition of BCF into a property-sharing, church-planting network. First, it would have been better to be more selective in the development of the church planting core team. The approach BCF took was to invite all members to consider if they were being led to join the new church plant. Doing so created a great deal of anxiety for all involved. A preferred method would be for the elders to determine how many people would be needed to be a part of any future church plant, and then to prayerfully discern who within the membership of their church might be well suited to be a part of a church-planting core team. Those selected individuals would then be approached to consider joining the new church, rather than extending an invitation to the whole church. This would create a greater sense that a group of members are being sent out and supported by a sending a church.

It is also necessary to think much more carefully about maintaining strong lines of communication throughout the church planting process. The Executive Director of the network should be an advisor to the church-planting Core Team. The Core Team should give regular updates to the members of the other churches, and seek counsel from their elders prior to proceeding. Doing so would create a stronger sense of the church plant being the work of the churches, rather than a group independent from the churches.

Conclusion

Guided by clear theological convictions about the nature and mission of the church, and driven by a passion to be creative and resourceful in the investment of funds, the BCF Network has been established as a property-sharing fellowship of churches. At the outset of this project, I gravely underestimated the magnitude of this transition. One church has become two churches. Property and assets have been transferred to the ownership of a new entity. Leadership and staff have been appointed to the BCF

Network. A global church-planting strategy, involving the creation of 20schemes has been launched.

At the conclusion of this work, I remain convinced that on-site church-planting is a theologically robust response to challenges that often accompany church growth. The result can be churches that are duly ordered, led by biblically faithful elders, comprised of a mutually accountable membership, meeting together regularly at one time and in one place for the purpose of worshipping Jesus, and observing the Lord's Supper and Baptism – and doing so in a meeting space that is made available for like-minded churches to gather in. The early churches did not own a building, but instead relied on either public spaces or the cooperation of other believers to make a large enough space available for the church to gather together at one time. The BCF Network model is built on these theological convictions, biblical principles and precedents from church history.

APPENDIX

**The By-Laws of the Bardstown Christian
Fellowship of Churches**
Approved and adopted by Bardstown Christian Fellowship on July 1, 2012. Amended, December 2014.

ARTICLE 1—NAME, PURPOSES, OFFICES
Name
1.1 Bardstown Christian Fellowship

Purpose
1.2 Bardstown Christian Fellowship exists to make disciples of Jesus Christ who worship God, serve each other and are his witnesses to the world.

Partnership:
1.3 Bardstown Christian Fellowship will be organized into churches. These churches relate to one another as interdependent partners.

Function:
> 1) Own, share and maintain property, facilities, equipment and resources to be made available to the churches that make up BCF,
> 2) Identify and train church planters to start new BCF churches,
> 3) Strategically start new churches as part of BCF,
> 4) Provide support staff and administrative support to the BCF churches,
> 5) Oversee and develop financial, administrative and property protocols and procedures,
> 6) Develop national and international gospel partnerships that serve to make disciples of all nations,
> 7) Develop and train leadership within the churches,
> 8) Provide seminars and training to members of the churches,
> 9) Create opportunities for the BCF churches to serve each other, and on occasion worship together.

ARTICLE 2—STRUCTURE AND OPERATION
Structure:
2.1 Bardstown Christian Fellowship is organized into churches. A church is made up of baptized believers who covenant together to worship, serve God and to practice Christian community. The mission of each individual Church is to make disciples of Jesus Christ who worship God, serve each other and are his witnesses to the world. Each church gathers weekly for corporate worship and to practice authentic Christian community through Community Groups who seek to make disciples by growing their members and evangelizing to reach the unchurched.

2.2 Each individual church that makes up Bardstown Christian Fellowship shall have its own members, shall appoint its own elders, and shall be organized into Community Groups.

The Council

2.3 The strategic direction and oversight of Bardstown Christian Fellowship shall be under the direction of the BCF Council meeting as a whole. The Council shall be comprised of elders who are men appointed to it by BCF churches. Each participating church shall appoint two of their elders to the Council. The employees and directors of Bardstown Christian Fellowship (including all pastors and support staff) are invited to attend Council meetings. The Executive Director serves as a member of the Council. The Council shall function as the Trustees of BCF.

Obligations of the Churches

2.4 A BCF church is required to comply with the following:
- I.   Adheres to the BCF Statement of Faith,
- II. Elects two of its elders to serve on the BCF Council for a two-year term.
- III. Complies with established BCF policies and procedures
- IV. Support and proactively work towards the vision and goals of BCF
- V.   Contributes on a weekly basis the set percentage (as per article 4.3) of undesignated funds to the BCF General Fund to meet the BCF Shared Expenses.

2.5   Churches that are started by BCF shall be recognized as equal partners following their first public weekly worship gathering.

Regular Meetings and Quorum

2.6   The Council shall meet a minimum of four times in a calendar year at the time to be determined by the BCF Council at a previous meeting or as called by the Executive Director. There shall be an "Annual Meeting" of the members of BCF churches. At the Annual Meeting the members shall affirm the direction and goals of BCF and affirm the BCF Council recommendation for a budget. The Executive Director as well as other directors shall give a report each year at the Annual Meeting.

2.7   A minimum of three fourths of the churches of BCF must be represented at a BCF Council meeting to constitute a quorum. Minutes of all regular and special meetings shall be taken and maintained at the BCF office.

Churches

2.8 Each church will establish for themselves standing rules on how they will operate and be governed including, but not limited to, the admission and oversight of members as well as the appointment of elders, staff, and ministry leaders.

2.9 Each church will receive into their membership those who are baptized believers that consent to the church covenant, and agree to submit to the BCF statement of faith. Each

individual church is responsible for receiving, shepherding and disciplining individual members as well as organizing their members into Community Groups.

2.10 Each church will appoint a plurality of elders to govern and oversee the members and ministries of the church. The churches will hold regular congregational meetings as determined by their standing rules.

2.11 Each church may, if they choose, appoint a pastoral staff. The church will provide for the compensations and benefits provided to that staff from the funds available within the individual church budget. The staff will be considered employees of Bardstown Christian Fellowship.

Executive Director:
2.12 The BCF Council shall appoint an Executive Director. He must be an elder of one of the member churches. He will serve at the discretion of the council and will not be subject to term limits. In the unfortunate event that a council member has lost confidence in the Executive Director a Motion of No Confidence can be presented to the council. In the event of such a motion the Executive Director must retain the support of three fourths of council members. The Executive Director functions as the executive head of BCF. He is responsible for the development and implementation of the strategy and direction of BCF. He presides over the BCF Council. He is considered a full member of The Council, but not a representative member of any one church. The Executive Director is the President of the Corporation.

2.13 The Executive Director shall in general provide oversight to the business affairs of Bardstown Christian Fellowship.
     i. The Executive Director shall have the general authority to recommend to the Council the employment of support staff as the proper conduct of operations may require and to propose their compensation.
     ii. The Executive Director may suspend any support staff member and make recommendation to the council for termination of employment.
     iii. The Executive Director may take such other actions on behalf of the Council as may be necessary or advisable to conduct the activities of BCF.
     iv. The Executive Director, and at least one other individual appointed by the Council, is authorized to sign any contracts or other instruments which the Council has authorized to be executed.
     v. The Executive Director is authorized to perform all duties incidental to the office of the Executive Director in addition to any other duties that may be prescribed by the Council from time to time.

Directors:
2.14 The Executive Director will recommend to the Council individuals to be appointed to the following positions:

I. Administrative Director: will oversee the facilities, finances, policies, and support staff. He is the Treasurer of the Corporation.

II. Missions Director: will implement national and international mission goals, lead the Global Outreach fundraising team, provide support to the BCF supported missionaries. The Missions Director is the liason to the member churches communicating the mission work and needs of the network.

III. Activities Director: will provide for regular training classes being offered to the members of BCF churches. Will foster the development of relationship between the churches in order to share best practice with one another. Will be responsible for recruiting and leading those within the BCF churches who have the ability to teach and share expertise in certain ministry areas.

ARTICLE 3—STAFF
General
3.1 The Council will appoint support staff as needed to best fulfill the purpose and goals of BCF. Support staff will be hired by and accountable to the appropriate Directors. This might include, but is not limited to, office manager, custodian, and ministry assistants providing ministry support to the Churches.

ARTICLE 4—FINANCES
Church Contributions
4.1 Each church shares responsibility for meeting the financial needs of BCF. Churches will receive general weekly offerings. On a weekly basis each church will remit their portion of the shared BCF expenses, in addition to the payroll expenses of any church staff to BCF.

Bank Account
4.2 Each church will be provided with a BCF bank account in which they can make deposits. The church will authorize a minimum of two check signers.

4.3 The Council will determine a set percentage of church income that is the required contribution that must be paid toward the BCF Shared Expenses. The BCF Council has no claims to, or oversight of, the funds given to the member church, other than those committed to BCF Shared Expenses.

Financial Review
4.4 As appropriate, and at least annually, the BCF Council will provide a full financial report to all the participating churches to be made available to their members for review. Each church is required to provide a monthly financial report of all income and expenses to the Administrative Director or to the agent appointed by the Administrative Director.

ARTICLE 5—AMENDMENTS
5.1 These bylaws may be altered, amended or repealed at any regular or special meeting of the BCF Council by a majority vote of the Council members, provided notice of the proposed alteration, amendment, or repeal be contained in the notice of such meeting provided to the BCF Council members at least thirty days in advance.

ARTICLE 6—LIFE OF NETWORK

Termination

6.1 A church may decide to withdraw from BCF. Such a decision must be approved by a majority of the members of that church. A minimum of a six-month notice of termination to be presented to the BCF Council is required.

6.2 In the event a church no longer adheres to the requirements set forth in these by-laws, action may be taken by The Council to remove a church from BCF. A decision to terminate the partnership with a church will come after a three fourth affirmative decision reached by The Council.

6.3 In the event that a church leaves BCF they will no longer have access to BCF property other than the balance of funds deposited in the church bank account. Such funds will be made available to the departing church immediately upon the termination of their membership.

New Members

6.4 A church planted by BCF will automatically be considered a fully participating partner with the other churches upon their first regular and public worship gathering.

6.5 The Council may determine to enter into a partnership with a church not previously connected to BCF. The petitioning church must agree to the requirements set forth in these by-laws. A church will be invited to join BCF by the unanimous decision reached at a meeting of the Council.

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ABSTRACT

TRANSITIONING BARDSTOWN CHRISTIAN
FELLOWSHIP, BARDSTOWN, KENTUCKY
INTO A CHURCH PLANTING NETWORK

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The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2015
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This project is an examination of the process by which Bardstown Christian Fellowship, Bardstown, Kentucky, transitioned from being a single congregation into a network of churches. In addition to recording the events that took place to initiate that transition, this project also sets out the biblical and theological framework that underpinned it.

Chapter 1 introduces the ministry project, stating the purpose and goals going forward. A brief history of Bardstown Christian Fellowship is presented along with a profile of the community in which the church is located. Definitions, limitations, and delimitations are presented.

Chapter 2 offers an exploration of four biblical texts directly related to the issue of church multiplication and organization. The research and discussion related to these texts provides a biblical basis for an understanding of the nature of the church. Jesus sets out basic parameters for how the church is to be organized. The Apostle Paul likewise provides instructions on how to organize the gathering of God's people.

Chapter 3 examines two alternative models for church multiplication and planting networks. The Multi-Site Movement and House Church Movements are presented and discussed. The goal for this chapter is to review and contrast these alternative models.

Chapter 4 gives the details of the fifteen-week ministry project. The goal for this chapter is to present the project in such a way that any other church can see the steps that are necessary for transitioning a single congregation into a resource sharing network of multiple churches.

Chapter 5 offers an evaluation of the goals, strengths and weaknesses of the ministry project, as well as personal reflections. This concluding chapter provides a review of the lessons learned from this process that would be prudent to follow were such a transition to be repeated.

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