

# Template for Churches Considering Collaboration

This guide is for churches considering working with others. This is the level two partnership guide which is aimed at churches exploring sharing staff and programs with other churches. The level three partnership guide is aimed at churches considering a complete merger with another church. The level one partnership guide is for churches wanting to consider sharing property and physical resources with other churches.

**This is designed when two or more separate churches or groups are considering a partnership involving sharing people or programs. Note. Partnerships involving groups other than churches can be equally as beneficial; however they are significantly more complex. If you are considering working with a government or non-church group please feel free to contact the Church Health and Capacity Building team.**

## Why Should We Consider a Partnership?

Many churches are facing significant challenges in effectively reaching their community and running church efficiently. Many of these churches are struggling with declining congregations not knowing what to do. One of the ways churches are tackling this is by considering partnerships with other churches. They are exploring sharing people and programs to increase their reach into the community and effectiveness in running church.

The partnerships that are having the greatest success are the ones that are driven by a vision for mission and growing the kingdom rather than just survival.

This second guide is provided as a way of exploring the possibility of partnerships with other congregations or groups. The BU Church Health and Capacity Building and Mission Catalyst teams are available to support churches through this process or considering exploring this option.

## Who are Partnerships For?

Partnerships are for any church that answers 'yes' to any of the following questions:

Could we accomplish more of our mission objectives if we partnered with another church?

Would the community benefit if we partnered with another group?

Would the kingdom of God be advanced if we entered into a partnership with another church?

Essentially Partnerships should be on the agenda as an option for nearly every church. It may not be the best option for everyone and it is not a one size fits all solution, but it should at least be considered.

## Some examples of Church Partnerships:

**Church A** and **Church B** are in the same area and are interested in starting a youth initiative but individually do not have the people or the finances to start it. However if they combined their resources for this program they could get something going.

**Church A** is running a youth program and **Church B** want to start a youth program. **Church B** has the people and finance to initiate a program but not the experience in running one. They wonder if it would be wiser to work with the existing program at **Church A** given they met nearby.

**Church A** wants to help some of the marginalised in its area and is thinking of starting an emergency food program. In talking about this with the congregation they discover **Church B** is already running a food program and struggling to keep it staffed with volunteers. **Church A's** major concern is for those who are in need so they enter into a partnership with **Church B** to provide volunteers and financial support.

**Church A** is looking for a part time pastor for pastoral care. They have a two day a week position. **Church B** is looking for a part time pastor to preach and organise teams around running the Sunday service. They have a three day a week position. Both churches are struggling to find a pastor who is in a position to only work part time. The churches are 20 minutes drive from one another. After extensive talks they agree to jointly employ a pastor serving the two churches.

**Church A** is looking at ways of easing the burden on their volunteer Treasurer who is finding it increasingly difficult to keep up with all the compliance issues around church finances. **Church B** has had the same issues and decided to employ a bookkeeper one day a week. The two churches work out that it would only be a small increase in work and cost for the bookkeeper to include **Church A's** work. So they enter into a partnership sharing the bookkeeper.

**Church A** wants to start a specialised ministry to disadvantaged families. **Church B** wants to do something similar and is 25 minutes drive from **Church A**. Both Churches know they need to employ someone with specialist skills in this area if they are going to minister effectively to these families. They work out a partnership to share a full-time social worker across the two churches.

You can continue to imagine the many scenarios where such partnerships could take place and the benefits that might come from them. The key to success in these joint ventures is in the detail of setting them up well and ongoing monitoring. It is crucial to have clear expectations about who is responsible for what, who is accountable to whom, and the expected outcomes for each of the groups.

The following are questions designed to help groups work through considering a partnership. Members or Leaders of the two churches may add extra questions to those listed here.

### Some of the Key Ingredients in Successful Partnerships

- Having a clear understanding of each group's expectations and desired outcomes.
- Having a key leader with the drive and relational skills to bring together a diverse group of people to form a partnership across the two church cultures.
- Having a leadership group that sets up and monitors the initial partnership.
- Thinking about partnerships sooner while you are healthy as a church rather than later when things aren't going well. The stronger both the churches are, the better.
- Taking a relational approach and helping as many as possible to get on board with the idea.
- Taking the time needed to be thorough and get it right. Be patient.
- Communicating as often as possible, to the point of over-communicating, to keep all the interested parties informed.

# 1. CHURCH CULTURE AND PRACTICE

## Issues

*Theology and doctrine*

## Questions

### How do the two churches compare theologically?

- What are their theological heritages or traditions (eg. charismatic, reformed, traditional, progressive etc.)?
- Do they share similar or divergent views on the Bible, baptism, spiritual gifts, the role of women, etc.?
- How will the above impact on the shared program or person?
- What are the possible points of tension and conflict?

## Notes

## Issues

*Mission and vision*

## Questions

### How does each of the churches answer the following questions?

- Why do we want this program to exist?
- What do we want this person to achieve?
- If we succeed in this joint venture, what would it look like in 3 years from now?
- How different/similar are our expectations?
- How much will this affect the outcome of the partnership?
- What are the possible points of tension and conflict?
- How will the above impact on the shared program or person?
- Honest answers to these questions will reveal how compatible the two groups are on the primary purpose of the partnership.

## Notes

### Issues

#### Values and preferences

### Questions

#### How similar or different are the two groups?

Would you describe your church as contemporary, traditional, a blend of both, or something completely different? What are your church's core values?

Do the church's emphasize participation or excellence?

How much communication and reporting is expected?

Who can lead the program? What are the expectations of leaders?

Who makes the decisions about what happens in the program day to day? Who chooses the overall direction of the program?

What are the possible points of tension and conflict?

How will the above impact on the shared program or person?

### Issues

#### Leadership and Accountability

### Questions

#### How are the two groups expecting leadership & accountability to take place?

Who can make which decision about how the program is run?

How can other ministry leaders input into the shared person's role or program?

How will your congregational governance model impact on the shared person or program? If a member in church A or B is unhappy about a particular matter how can they process their concern given two autonomous groups are involved?

To whom will the shared person or program be accountable?

How will reporting be done and how often?

How are volunteer leaders found and appointed?

How would the partnership be dissolved if needed?

If sharing a person, how will a review be conducted? What will be the criteria for the review? Who will conduct it?

### Notes

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# 1. CHURCH CULTURE AND PRACTICE

## Issues

### Budget

## Questions

### How will budgets be worked out?

Who will have input and who will make final decisions?

What accounting processes and procedures will be expected or required?

If the shared person wants to do fund raising, how will that be handled by the two groups involved?

## Notes

## Issues

### Mission styles and philosophy

## Questions

### How similar or different are the two churches approaches to outreach?

Is there a focus on social action as 'the mission' or proclamation of the Gospel, or both?

Does the shared person or program have any evangelistic intent? If so what are the expectations about how that will happen?

How will volunteers be trained to ensure a consistent mission practice in line with shared expectations?

How will decisions be made about which church seekers or new believers will be linked with?

Who will determine which other church programs will be promoted and how will that promotion be done?

## Notes

### Issues

*Property, facility, contracts*

### Questions

#### **What buildings will the shared person or program run out of?**

What cost will be associated with that? Who will pay for which costs? How will costs be allocated between the churches?

Whose insurance will cover the program or the person?

Who will own any assets purchased for the programme?

If changes to property are required for the programme, who will make decisions about this?

Under which group will the employment contract be arranged? How does this impact on either churches constitutions'.

If property is damaged as a result of the shared program how will the issue be resolved?

### Notes

### Issues

*Equipment*

### Questions

#### **What equipment exists, photocopiers, computers, data projectors, sporting equipment, etc.? How will it be shared?**

What equipment will need to be purchased? Who will have ownership of it? How will it be shared if other programs from the two churches wish to access it?

Who will be responsible for maintaining any shared equipment?

If equipment is donated, who will it belong to if the program stops?

Who can make these decisions?

### Notes