

MentorNet #10

Practice Church Body Life Between Congregations

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Vigorous spiritual health and effective ministry arise from interaction *between* churches and cell groups as much as from interaction within them. The many New Testament commands to serve “one another” apply to the whole Body of Christ, that is, to believers in all the congregations of an area, for no one local church is the whole Body of Christ but part of it.

The value of interaction between churches or cells is particularly evident in pioneer fields where infant churches are multiplying for the first time. The new churches often enhance weak ministries or other deficiencies by grasping the hand extended to them from other congregations nearby, some of which also may be very new.

The same kind of need for cooperation between churches also becomes painfully evident in older, larger churches. As they grow in size and wealth, many feel self-sufficient and break off healthy ties of support and restraint with other congregations. This inevitably leads to imbalance in their ministries.

Interaction between congregations follows the New Testament model

Healthy church body life requires that believers serve one another locally and in other churches or small groups, using their different spiritual gifts. (1 Corinthians 12-13, Ephesians 4:11-12 and Romans 12:3-11) God himself requires continual interaction between congregations as well as within them. The New Testament city churches, such as those in Jerusalem and Ephesus, were not large congregations that only met together in one place, but were comprised of clusters of tiny house churches or cells that celebrated communion and learned the Word of God from “house to house” (Acts 2:46; 20:20).

In the book of Acts and the epistles we find:

- Workers visiting or moving to another area to help other churches: Acts 8:14; 11:20-23; 11:27-30; 14:21-23; 15:2-4; 15:23-27; Romans 15:25; 15:40-41; 16:1-2; 1 Corinthians 16:16-17; 2 Corinthians 8:17-19; Philemon 22; 18:21-23; 18:27; Titus 1:5
- One congregation sending offerings to another: Acts 24:17; Romans 15:26-27; 1 Corinthians 16:1-3; 2 Corinthians 8;
- Believers in one church greeting friends in other churches: Romans 16:3;-15, 21-23; 1 Corinthians 16:19-20; 2 Corinthians 13:13; Philippians 4:21-22; Colossians 4:10-15; 2 Timothy 4:19-21; Titus 3:15; Philemon 23-24; Hebrews 13:24; 1 Peter 5:13; 2 John 13; 3 John 14

Interaction between congregations assures a healthier balance of ministries

“A church’s greatest weakness is its greatest strength taken to excess.” This painfully accurate truism warns against imbalance in a church’s ministries — incomplete church body life leads to an incomplete, spiritually deformed church body. The New Testament requires that we keep certain vital ministries in balance (1 Corinthians 12, the “body life” chapter). There are so many ministries that one person cannot oversee them alone. Overseers must delegate many pastoral responsibilities. In the list below, mark those ministries that need urgent attention in your church

Essential Church Ministries

Shepherd

- Watch** over the spiritual life of the flock
- Strengthen family life**
- Seek straying lambs**, correct and restore them
- Ward off wolves**--persons who teach falsehood, divide the body or abuse power
- Counsel** those with personal or family problems

Build the Body

- Pray** (practice intercession, daily family and personal devotions, wage spiritual warfare)
- Cultivate loving fellowship** with wholesome social activities and times for everyone to participate in some way in the action
- Worship** as a body, celebrate the Lord's Supper
- Organize** so that members serve in gift-based ministries (larger churches need small groups that are tiny churches within the larger one)
- Give** and practice all aspects of Christian stewardship
- Cooperate with other congregations** to get help for weak ministries, and offer help for theirs
- Evaluate** all these ministries regularly and strengthen those that are weak

Reach out

- Evangelize** and confirm repentance without delay with baptism
- Serve the needy**
- Reproduce** the body in daughter churches
- Send missionaries** to neglected peoples

Instruct

- Teach** and apply the Word, by preaching and personal discipling
- Equip** all members for ministry
- Train new pastors**, and group leaders as shepherding elders

Keeping a healthy, edifying balance between these vital ministries requires the kind of interaction between congregations that we find in the New Testament. This is because groups that are small enough to practice the many New Testament "one another" commands during their meetings are usually too small to sustain a healthy balance of the different gift-based ministries. They do not have enough people to cover the range of spiritual gifts and services that God intends for His people to provide. The 'one another' commands are listed below. Examples: Bear one another's burdens, confess your faults to one another, correct one another, serve one another, etc.

Interaction between congregations requires communication between churches at the local level

Those who mentor missionaries and pastors in pioneer mission fields find that regional fellowships serving a limited area in practical ways consistently prove a blessing and source of strength to the churches. You might recall the camp meetings in which so many of our grandparents found Christ, received challenging teaching, found godly spouses and were directed into ministry opportunities.

Those were similar to the Hebrew annual festivals in Jerusalem, which God used repeatedly to renew His people. However, wherever missionaries or pastors organize on a larger scale without allowing churches to interact directly in practical ways, they often cause friction and pain.

Most edifying interaction between churches begins at the local level. It seldom arises from inter-church alliances commonly described as ecumenical, national, international, denominational, interdenominational or inter-faith. Those organizations usually involve only officials who represent their church members, or missionaries who serve far away. Healthful interaction between congregations requires grass-root cooperation between members of different churches who see and serve one another regularly.

Like the interaction that takes place between the small groups of a cell church, churches must be located near enough to work together in projects that enhance fellowship, evangelism, intercession, community development or other endeavors of mutual benefit to their churches or their communities. In both churches and cell groups, interaction requires purposeful, decisive and disciplined action by leaders.

When the distance between churches is too far to allow hands-on, grass-root interaction, then their focus shifts from practical projects to inter-church politics. Church politics at a national level in newly formed church associations on mission fields often become bumpy. In many cases, denominational structures lure power-hungry types to seek leadership positions. In the older, mainline denominations many leaders in such positions admittedly doubt Christ's atoning death and bodily, life-giving resurrection while passionately embracing inter-faith cooperation in which clergy persons are ashamed to pray publicly in Jesus' name, lest they offend their Buddhist "brothers."

Developing good communication between churches normally does not require attending another workshop or seminar. Churches seeking help to strengthen a ministry too often send their leaders to a workshop to learn some new method. They go asking, "How can we do it?" That is usually the wrong question. They should rather ask, "Who can help us do it?" A relational solution is more often the biblical approach. Those who can offer help are usually available in the congregation or another one nearby, if we let them know that we need it.

We cannot serve one another, if we do not know one another's weaknesses and strengths. This requires communication and trust. E-mail is an awkward way to communicate by comparison with face-to-face conversation, but it is better than nothing. If you want to let us know areas in which you, your church or your small group wants help, let us know. We have made this easy for churches in North America and overseas. Please, describe for us your needs or your desire to get help, by visiting <<http://www.homestead.com/mentorandmultiply/roam.html>>.

Interaction between congregations requires freedom to do what the Holy Spirit enables us to do

Churches will not practice interactive body life simply because their mission statement or bylaws says to do it. Nor do they practice it by electing leaders democratically to positions to foster it. Two problems arise from democratic elections. One is that democracy excludes persons who serve out

of love but are not known well enough to win an election. Or, several people have the spiritual gifts to shepherd others, but the church bylaws only allow a smaller number.

The other problem is that churches elect people for a limited term, while the Holy Spirit's gifting has no such limits. The election says, "You may use your spiritual gift to serve in this ministry until your term expires." Similarly, when elected leaders coordinate *Train and Multiply*, or other programs that combine church planting with pastoral training, the program often "expires" when an elected leader's term expires. Most pastors must open the door much wider to spontaneous volunteer service.

Not only pastors but also all of Christ's servants can take the initiative in reaching out to members of other churches. Have you visited a church and felt disappointed, because no one spoke warmly to you? Pastor Mike Blondino would respond if you voiced this complaint, "Shame on you!" In other words, take the lead. Set the example. Use the power that the Holy Spirit gives you to reach out.

Balanced ministry requires purposeful implementation of the New Testament 'One Another' commands both locally and between congregations

Discuss with your staff and membership, specifically *how*, and with *whom*, to practice these "one another" commands. Study the ones you need most urgently to practice. Let your people decide which ones to study.

Build Loving Fellowship One with Another

- Love one another: John 13:34-35; 5:12, 17; Romans 12: 10; 1 Thessalonians 4:9; 1 John 3:11,14, 23; 4:7, 11, 12; 2 John 1:5; 1 Peter 1:22
- Love one another to fulfill the law: Romans 13:8
- Increase our love one for another: 2 Thessalonians 1:3
- Abound in love for another: 1 Thessalonians 3:12
- Love each other deeply, to cover a multitude of sins: 1 Peter 4:8

Interact with care:

- Have fellowship one with another: 1 John 1:7
- Forgive one another: Ephesians 3:13; 4:32; Colossians 3:13
- Greet one another with a holy kiss (embrace in some cultures): Romans 16:16; 1 Corinthians 16:20; 2 Corinthians 13:12; 1 Peter 5:14
- Wait for one another to break bread: 1 Corinthians 11:33
- Bear one another's sufferings: 1 Corinthians 12:26

Serve one another:

- Serve one another with the gifts each person has received: 1 Peter 4:10
- Serve one another in love: Gal. 5:13
- Be kind to each other: 1 Thessalonians 5:15
- Care for one another: 1 Corinthians 12:25
- Bear the burdens one for another: Gal. 6:2

- Wash one another's feet as a sign of humble service: John 13:14
- Work with one another: 1 Corinthians 3:9; 2 Corinthians 6:1

Teach one another:

- Teach one another: Colossians 3:16
- Instruct one another: Romans 5:14

Encourage:

- Encourage one another: Colossians 3:16; Hebrews 10:25
- Exhort one another: Hebrews 3:13
- Speak the truth to one another: Ephesians 4:25
- Lay down our lives one for another: 1 John 3:16
- Spur one another to love and good deeds: Hebrews 10:24

Edify:

- Edify (strengthen, build up) one another: 1 Thessalonians 4:18 & 5:1, 11
- Edify one another gathering together each one with a hymn, a word of instruction, a revelation, a tongue or its interpretation: 1 Corinthians 14:26

Give spiritual care:

- Confess our sins one to another: James 5:16
- Pray for one another: James 5:16

Cultivate harmony with humility one with another

- Honor one another: Romans 12:10
- Be of one mind one with another: 2 Corinthians 13:11; Romans 12:16; 15:5
- Do not criticize one another: Romans 14:13
- Do not speak bad one of another: James 4:11; 5:9
- Submit to one another: Ephesians 5:21
- Be clothed with humility toward one another: 1 Peter 5:5

Live in harmony:

- Have patience one with another: Ephesians 4:2
- Live in peace one with another: Matt. 9:50
- Receive one another with hospitality: Romans 15:7; 1 Peter. 4:9
- Glorify God together: Romans 15:6

To find mentoring tools and sites, visit <<http://www.MentorAndMultiply.com>>.

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