

# Collaboration for Bigger Kingdom Impact

18 Jul 2013 by Daniel Dow

By Chip Sweney

Our culture in the United States and in the Western hemisphere, in general, tends toward individualism, and inter-church connection is frequently no different. Often we are preoccupied with our church, our impact, and our role in God's work. We operate as silos and are unaware of, or are not in relationship with, the churches located immediately around us. If there is one or two churches close by we may make an effort to build relationships with them, but it usually stops there.

Many may ask:
*"Why would we partner with other churches or even churches outside our denomination?"*

At Perimeter Church we asked ourselves that very question a few years ago and began to explore the possibility of reaching out to other churches in our area. Soon we began to work with other evangelical churches in different denominations, many of which had different worship styles, different theology, and a different racial and ethnic demographic make-up.

Why would we do this? What have we learned? How have we benefited? And how has the kingdom of God been advanced? Let's take a look.

## A Witness to the World

Why are we intentionally building relationships and working together with churches that are "different" from us? The first reason is that it is biblical. Jesus emphasized the unity of the body of Christ as He neared the end of His life. In John 17:20-21 He prayed to the Father: "I do not ask on behalf of these alone, but for those also who believe in me through their word: that they may be one; even as you, Father, are in me and I in you, that they may also be in us, so that the world may believe that you sent me."

Jesus desires that all who believe in Him be one, just as the Father, Son, and Spirit are one. A primary reason for unity is that the body may be a witness to the world and the world may believe in Him. When we, as God's church, are unified as one, we send a powerful message that we share transcendent values. This does not take anything away from the necessity of denominations. Our theology is important to us, and it should always be. But working together with other denominations does not take anything away from our theology.

Another biblical example of unity in the midst of diversity is shown by Paul in 1 Corinthians 12. He uses our human body as an illustration of the body of Christ with all of its parts. 1 Corinthians 12: 12 -14 says, "For even as the body is one and yet has many members, and all the members of the body, though they are many, are one body, so also is Christ … . For the body is not one member, but many."

We often use this text to talk about unity within our local church. Each church has different people who represent different parts of the body with different gifts and passions. An important gauge of effectiveness for a church is that all members are exercising their gifts, and they are connected together as one. We can also consider this text from a larger viewpoint. For example, the body represents the body of Christ in a city, and the individual parts are the local churches in that city. Therefore, we must be connected. Each church has its own "flavor"- theology, worship style, passions, and giftings – but each church is connected to other churches.

When churches are in relationship with each other, working for the welfare of the city, the body is most effective in advancing the kingdom of God.

Another biblical reference to unity is in the way Paul addresses his letters to the churches. In 1 and 2 Corinthians, he says, “To the church of God at Corinth.” In 1 and 2 Thessalonians, he says, “To the church of the Thessalonians.” He does not use the plural but the singular for the church in a city. He always does this when he addresses a group of churches in a city except in his letter to the Galatians where he says, “To the churches of Galatia.” However, Galatia was not a city, it was a region. The point is that Paul considers the churches in a city as one. It is clear that Jesus is passionate about unity and His followers shared that passion. At our church we have come to believe that partnering with other churches demonstrates a unity of the body to our watching communities.

## A Greater Vision

The second reason we are partnering with churches outside our denomination (PCA – Presbyterian Church of America) is that our vision is so big it could never be accomplished by a single church, or even a single denomination. Our vision is to see our community transformed and Atlanta become much more reflective of the kingdom of God. This vision includes seeing many more people in Atlanta become believers who truly live out the gospel. It also includes a drastic reduction in some of the greatest ills in our metro area. For example, as part of Unite! (a network of churches from a variety of denominational, cultural, and ethnic backgrounds) we have 2020 outcome goals that include three simple things: that every child is safe from commercial sexual exploitation, that every student has an opportunity to graduate from high school, and that every foster child has a family who adopts him or her.

The love of Christ moves us to care about the thousands of students who are falling behind and dropping out of school, the hundreds of girls and boys who monthly are forced to prostitute their bodies in Atlanta, and the 1,500 foster children in Georgia who are waiting to be adopted. When one’s vision is this big, it can never be about one church or even one denomination. The broader body of Christ in a city must work together. We have found that when our hearts are gripped by the incredible needs of our community, we are compelled by the love of Christ to do something about those needs. As God moves within other churches, working together happens naturally as our passions align.

Unite! was birthed in Atlanta in 2003 out of a simple premise that churches can be more effective in making a kingdom impact in the community if we work together. It does not matter what size a church is when it works with others. Churches working together become a part of something bigger than themselves.

In my book, A New Kind of Big, I share Perimeter’s story when as a church we added the “hand” to the head and heart. The head represents good theology and doctrine, the heart represents a focus on the gospel, and the hand represents compassion for those in need around us. We had to repent for not having the hand. Adding the hand has resulted in us working with other churches throughout Atlanta over the last nine years. We have a long way to go, but we believe that working with other churches in serving our communities has helped us to become healthier and has allowed us to have a voice and influence within our community. There

is a strong message when a diverse community sees diverse churches working together for the benefit of the community.

## The Power and Beauty of Collaboration

In the early days of Unite! a number of churches began to partner in apartment complexes that were full of immigrants and refugees. This is still happening. We (Perimeter Church) were doing an after-school program with the children in a complex that was primarily Hispanic. The challenge was that none of our people spoke Spanish. Another Unite! church (Victory World Church) had many people in their church who spoke Spanish and they joined us as we ministered to the residents of the apartment complex. As we worked with the students they were able to start ministering to the parents, and our newly coordinated ministry began to impact the whole family. Soon several other churches joined us. Perimeter was able to be part of a much bigger ministry because we partnered with churches that were not like us.

Another example of the power and beauty of collaboration is Street GRACE. Unknown to many, Atlanta is a hub for child sex trafficking, and the average age of the girls is 14 years old. When a number of Unite! leadership churches became aware that this was going on, we were determined to make a difference. How could we not? God's heart for children and for fighting injustice is so clear in Scripture. We could not ignore this horrific injustice.

Eight Unite! churches hired a strategic consultant and developed a plan for churches to get involved. This led to the birth of Street GRACE (www.streetgrace.org), which is a movement of churches united with public, private, and social sectors to bring the abolition of child sex slavery and exploitation in Atlanta. We're learning that multi-sector collaboration occurs when churches team with public and private sectors in solving a serious issue within the community. An encouraging outcome of this multi-sector collaboration resulted in significant legislation that was passed in Georgia which toughens the penalties for pimps and also provides funds for the restoration of the girls trapped in this lifestyle. Since Street GRACE was started we have quadrupled the number of girls that are being helped. The senator who was sponsoring the bill wore a Street GRACE t-shirt as she spoke on the floor! No one church could ever have started Street GRACE. It took a collaboration of churches that were willing to fight together and with others.

This is not rocket science. Churches working together have great impact. It is time for the body of Christ to act like the big "C" church. As the body of Christ becomes a blessing to the community it is not hard to imagine that our churches are going to see many people who are presently outside of the church be drawn to the church, many for the first time.

*"There is one body and one Spirit,*
*just as also you were called in one hope of your calling;*
*one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all*

*who is over all and through all and in all"*
(Ephesians 4:4-6)

Chip Sweney is the author of A New Kind of Big: How Churches of Any Size Can Partner to Transform Communities. He is also Next Gen and Community Transformation pastor at Perimeter Church in Atlanta.

[ Image Credits ]

← Network Structure (Dave Hackett)

Vision →

## One thought on "Collaboration for Bigger Kingdom Impact"



synergycommons
18 Jul 2013 at 3:24 pm

There's no doubt that one of the areas of greatest untapped potential for collaboration is at the local church level. What Chip Sweney, and Perimeter Church, and Unite! Atlanta are doing needs to replicated a hundred thousand times in other cities around the world.

Check out the Unite! website and look at their prayer guide. This is the kind of thing EVERY missional network or partnership should have.

*Do you see potential for local church / community collaboration where you live? How aware are you of what others are already doing in your own community?*

Chip's analogy of the "head" "heart" and "hands" of local church effectiveness is intriguing.

*How strongly developed is your own local church in these three areas?*

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