

about

ADVANCE

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1

THE BIG IDEA

LET'S DO IT AGAIN

The book of Acts kicks off with Jesus “giving commands through the Holy Spirit” (Acts 1:2). Perhaps the most important command is recorded in verse 8 of chapter one: “And you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria and to the ends of the earth.” There are obvious echoes of Isaiah 49, where God says that it is “too small a thing” for the gospel to be known only in Israel, and that far off islands and distant shores will hear the good news. Jesus was commissioning his disciples to take the gospel to the neighborhoods of Jerusalem and the nations of the world in their generation. He was commissioning them to evangelize their generation.

This same commission is given to every subsequent generation – it *has* to be, because every generation is born in desperate need of Christ. *Every* generation needs to be freshly evangelized. *Every* generation needs their own book of Acts. This is the “Big Idea” of Advance. Let’s do it again. Let’s do the book of Acts again. In our generation.

THE NEXT THIRTY YEARS

The twenty-eight chapters of Acts span a period of about thirty years. In a mere three decades, the gospel made outstanding progress all around the Mediterranean and to Rome, and probably further. Why should similar gospel advance not happen again in our day? We are as normal and flawed as the early disciples were. We have the same God, the same commission, and the same power of the Spirit as they did. Yet, we also have the full canon of Scripture, 2000 years more church experience and immense technology at our disposal. What might we accomplish for the kingdom in the next thirty years if we take God at his Word, draw on his power and partner together to see people saved and disciplined through the planting of hundreds of gospel-centered, gospel-proclaiming churches?

Think back thirty years: how old were you? Think ahead thirty years: how old will you be? You may still have two books of Acts worth of time ahead of you. You may have one, or half. Some people die wondering if their life was really worth it. We will not have that problem. Together, we can plant and strengthen churches in our generation like the first generation of the Church did in theirs.

ADVANCING TOGETHER

Some years ago, we planted a church in the east of Johannesburg, South Africa. A seventeen-year-old member of their church, called Lebo, died of cancer. At the funeral, his father said that the happiest day of his life was carrying his new-born son, Lebo, home from the hospital. The second happiest was when Lebo came home from a church meeting - in that very building - saying that he had become a Christ-follower. Through the ministry of that church, God had reached out to Lebo and given him eternal life. Through Malcolm and Megan Gammon and their church-planting team “doing it again,” Lebo is now enjoying a Christ-filled eternity. Our generation has millions of Lebos who need to meet Jesus through existing churches and brand new churches. Let’s get them planted. Let’s get them strengthened. **Let’s do it again.**

A background image showing a group of people participating in a team-building exercise. They are standing on a platform, holding onto ropes that are attached to a central point above them, forming a diamond shape. The entire image is overlaid with a semi-transparent red color.

②

**THE
POWER OF
PARTNERSHIP**

WHY PARTNERSHIP?

PARTNERSHIP IS BIBLICAL

Partnership is an often overlooked, yet vitally important aspect of New Testament Christianity. Although the ministry of Paul and other prominent New Testament leaders was in some ways unique and, therefore, in some ways unrepeatable, the *pattern* of partnership is repeatable. God still provides suitably gifted people to facilitate such partnerships today. Paul used the word, “partnership,” to describe both church leaders and churches working together:

As for Titus, he is my **partner** and fellow worker for your benefit (2 Cor. 8:23)

I thank my God in all my remembrance of you...because of your **partnership** in the gospel (Phil. 1:3-5)

In the Bible, partnership happened between individuals and churches, and churches and churches. They helped each other out in terms of *doctrine and practice* (Acts 8:14-25; Gal. 3), they *relocated leaders* to strengthen other situations (Acts 11:19-23, 25-26, 12:25, 16:1-3), they sent *individuals and teams* on short-term strengthening visits (Acts 11:27, 19:21-22; 1 Cor. 4:15-17; Phil. 2:19-29; 2 Tim. 1:18), they sent *money* to help each other and bless the wider society (Acts 11:28-30), and they helped advance the gospel together and *plant churches* (Rom. 15:24; 2 Cor. 10:15-16).

PARTNERSHIP IS NECESSARY FOR MISSION AND MATURITY

Our **mission** from Jesus is to take the gospel to both the neighborhoods and the nations, to both Jerusalem and the ends of the earth (Matt. 28:19; Acts 1:8). How could any local church do that alone? But if we organize ourselves properly, every church can contribute meaningfully to world mission. Every church can *consistently* pray and give financially to church plants; and every church can *periodically* contribute leaders to church plants. Together, our mission can be healthier, stronger, longer, and more sustainable. In terms of **maturity**, no matter how experienced a team of elders are, a local church will not reach full maturity without outside perspective and input. In fact, New Testament trans-local ministry had a specific aim to help bring churches to maturity (Col. 1:28, 4:12).

PARTNERSHIP IS CATALYTIC

Partnership helps *enhance a church's strengths* and helps shore up her weaknesses. Partnership helps *maximize a church's potential influence*, providing a network through which individuals and churches can influence more broadly than they otherwise could. Partnership *provides resources* to help a church plant more churches in her region than she could working alone, including prayer, people, finances, encouragement, and skills.

PARTNERSHIP PROTECTS

Sometimes churches go through immensely challenging seasons. For example, if a church loses a leader for any reason, it is much easier to support the church and find a suitable replacement leader if the church is engaged in a meaningful partnership.

FOUR PILLARS OF PARTNERSHIP

Agreeing that church-to-church partnerships are Biblical and necessary is the easy part. The challenge is working out how these partnerships worked in the Bible, and then faithfully imitating them. The clearest picture that the Bible gives us of church-to-church partnership is the partnership that developed around Paul. This partnership was shaped around four main things:

SIMILAR DOCTRINE AND VALUES

The content of the epistles testifies to how much Paul wanted the churches that he worked with to believe correct doctrine and be “pillars of truth” (1 Tim. 3:15). Paul didn’t say, “Outside of believing that Jesus is Lord, it doesn’t really matter what you believe. It just matters that we plant more churches!” While planting more churches certainly mattered to Paul, so did having these churches believe the right doctrine and values. See *Chapter 5* for more about our beliefs and values.

SHARED MISSION

In addition to partnering around truth, Pauline partnerships were missionally productive. Together, they planted churches, strengthened churches, and pooled finances for worthy causes, such as drought relief in Judea (1 Cor. 16; 2 Cor. 8:5). Advance partner churches consider themselves active “*fellow workers*” (1 Cor. 3:9) in our shared mission to *plant and strengthen* churches. Advance exists because we are on mission together. The deep sense of camaraderie and belonging that we enjoy is a derivative of our missional partnership, not the purpose of our partnership.

GENUINE RELATIONSHIP

The churches that Paul was involved with couldn’t think about God without thinking about Father or church without thinking about *family* (Eph. 3:14-15). The bandwidth of relationships ranged from brotherly connection on one side through to seasoned fathers like Paul on the other (2 Tim. 1:2; 1 Cor. 4:17; 1 Cor. 4:15-16) - but never as a purely functional or organizational atmosphere. Paul encouraged church leaders to lead their churches in a family manner (1 Tim. 5:1-2), and sometimes referred to the churches he partnered with as his children. It was on that basis that he felt authority to encourage, comfort and urge them to live lives worthy of God (1 Thess. 2:6-8, 11-12). Paul even displayed concern for the church leader’s physical health (1 Tim. 5:23) and often ended his letters with lists of personal greetings and messages to people in the church that he had grown to know over years of involvement. With the pressures of a busy world and an expanding movement, we need to be clear that the relational aspect of church partnership is a Biblical imperative, or else it is easy to opt for a less relational style. Theologically convinced of the importance of genuine relationships and a family feel, we cultivate relationships characterized by genuine affection, respect, honesty, trust, and fun.

RECOGNIZED, SUITABLY GIFTED LEADERSHIP

Leadership is a gift from God, and necessary to help any group move forward together, including a movement of churches. The leaders of our movement and within our movement are recognized on the basis of sound character and suitable gifts; and they play an important role in helping us partner together. See *Chapter 6* for more about how leadership works in Advance, but we need to be clear that we believe that the New Testament teaches that local elders are the highest human authority in the local church. Therefore, we consider partner churches as autonomous, but interdependent.

DIFFERENT TYPES OF PARTNERSHIP

To help clarify what we mean by “partnership,” it is helpful to briefly reflect on different types of partnership. Successful partnerships seem to form around either *just one* of these four things (we could refer to these as “single issue partnerships”), or around *all four* components (we could refer to these as Pauline-type partnerships), but seldom around two or three components.

SINGLE-ISSUE PARTNERSHIPS

Some partnerships deliberately choose to partner around one main thing: similar doctrine and values. They may play an excellent role in helping their partner churches develop *similar doctrine and values*, but they do not try to mobilize their churches to *shared mission*, or to *genuine relationship*; and, therefore, *recognized leadership* is not a critical factor in the partnership.

Or, think of a Pastors Fraternal in a town consisting of pastors from many different denominations. This would usually be based simply on *genuine relationship* - a worthy goal. If it made *similar doctrine and values* a component of partnership, the fraternal would soon fracture. Or, if they tried to do *mission* together (outside of “neutral” endeavors, such as prayer, or social action projects), things would likely unravel. Or, if one pastor assumes too much in the way of *leadership*, the fraternal is probably on borrowed time.

Single-issue partnerships such as these can be very valuable, but we believe they should complement Pauline-type partnerships.

PAULINE-TYPE PARTNERSHIPS

Partnering around *all four elements* is an audacious yet worthy endeavor. For such a partnership to be successful, equal attention needs to be given to all four components because they are all interdependent. Often, churches don't know why they are feeling dissatisfied in their partnership or denomination until they evaluate it using this Biblical, four-part grid, asking themselves the following questions:

Do we share similar *doctrine and values* with our partnership/denomination?

Are we meaningfully involved in *mission* with our partnership/denomination?

Do we enjoy *genuine relationship* within our partnership/denomination?

Do we *recognize* the gifting of God on those who *lead* our partnership/denomination?

If one of the answers to these questions is “no,” the partnership will feel uncomfortable. If two or three answers are “no,” the partnership will be unsustainable. The New Testament model of partnership assumes all four aspects of partnership, resulting in a holistic, satisfying partnership.

CONCLUSIONS

We believe that it is preferable for every local church to be involved in a holistic, Pauline-type partnership, as its primary partnership. The church should also then enjoy some subsidiary, single-issue partnerships.

Because Advance aspires to be a holistic, Pauline-type partnership that “ticks all the main boxes” (at least the four main ones), Advance partner churches do not have the capacity, or inclination, for another, similarly comprehensive, partnership. However, Advance partner churches will hopefully enjoy beneficial relationships with other single-issue networks. That said, some Advance partner churches maintain their affiliation with their denomination in a nominal sense, so long as they are free to fully partner with Advance. We describe our partnership as *primary but not exclusive*. As a movement, we actively honor, learn from, and engage with churches and movements outside of our partnership.

FAQs ABOUT PARTNERSHIP

HOW WILL THE CONGREGATION FEEL THE BENEFITS OF PARTNERSHIP?

The congregation should feel the benefit of partnership with Advance by (a) *being exposed* to visiting ministers from Advance, (b) *being enlarged* by being kept informed about news and needs across the movement, (c) some congregants attending various Advance gatherings, and (d) benefiting from *better ministry from their leaders*, who will be blessed the most by Advance. Elders are warmly encouraged to ensure that all their members receive Advance publications (the prayer mailer and online magazine), which are specifically designed to help each congregant stay current with regards to what is happening in Advance.

HOW CAN WE HELP OUR CHURCH ENGAGE WITH CHURCH PLANTING AND ADVANCE?

First, help your church become convinced that church planting is the primary way that the gospel advances, *and* that your church needs to be involved in church planting. You could preach a series on the book of Acts, or a single sermon on church planting, or you could do a 5-10-minute mini-teaching on the Biblical basis for planting. Second, make sure your congregation knows about the money you sow into church plants each month via Advance. Third, profile different church plants. You could schedule one Sunday a month to take a few minutes to profile a plant, and then pray for it together. You can show the church plant video, or communicate with the leader via live video conference, or have the leader send you a video message that you can play. Fourth, make sure the *online magazine* and the *prayer mailer* reaches the inbox of every member of your church. These publications are loaded with news on church plants and help everyone feel meaningfully connected to church planting and to Advance. Fifth, consider encouraging, or even tasking, various Small Groups to adopt a church plant for a year. They could pray for it, give money to it, send encouragements to it, or even send a person/team to visit it. Finally, and most importantly, try to be hands-on with a church plant in your region. There are Advance church plants happening in most places where there are Advance churches; and nothing beats joining in on the ground.

DOES ADVANCE FUNCTION LIKE A DENOMINATIONAL GROUPING?

Different denominations operate differently, so this is a hard question to answer. However, we find that adhering closely to *all four* aspects of New Testament partnership enables us to enjoy the best aspects of belonging to a denomination, while avoiding the worst.

HOW CAN PARTNERSHIP BE MEANINGFUL IF THERE ARE NOT YET OTHER ADVANCE CHURCHES IN OUR LOCAL AREA?

First, we hope that it will not be long before your church plants a church in your area; and we would like to help you with that. Second, Jesus' commission to your local church is to be on mission not only in the neighborhoods but also in the nations. You are already on mission to some degree in your neighborhood; and partnership with Advance can help you be on mission much further afield. Third, in terms of fellowship and connection, there will need to be more travel (both ways) for a while, but that is not insurmountable. Finally, modern technology provides us with many options in terms of staying connected.

WHAT ARE THE EXPECTATIONS OF ADVANCE PARTNER CHURCHES AND HOW COULD WE JOIN?

See Chapter 8 Expectations and Joining

An aerial, black and white photograph of a town built on a steep hillside. The buildings are densely packed and follow the contours of the slope. The background shows a dark, overcast sky and more distant hills.

3

**PLANTING
CHURCHES
TOGETHER**

WHY?

BE CONVINCED

The Great Commission, to take the gospel to the neighborhoods and the nations, is given to every generation - it *has* to be, because every generation needs to be freshly evangelized and discipled. The timeless New Testament strategy for this is church planting. We need to be convinced of this.

BE SOBER

Planting churches is hard. Planting healthy churches is harder. Repeating the process on a regular basis is harder still. It is hard to birth a new church without the “mother” church taking major strain. If the new church grows large and healthy, but the “mother” church shrinks and weakens, there is no net gain for the kingdom. For there to be net gain for the kingdom, both churches need to do well and, very importantly, there needs to be *reproduction (new converts)*, not just repositioning of existing converts.

BE INVOLVED

Church planting cannot be outsourced to the movement. We are the movement! Planters can only be produced from the local churches in the movement. Certainly, the synergies of the movement can greatly help local churches with this process, but the movement is only as strong as the local churches in the movement.

HOW?

Sometimes a particular local church will “quarterback” a plant with the support of the movement. Other times an individual in the movement will “quarterback” the plant assisted by various local churches. We tend to invest movement-wide resources in particularly strategic and challenging plants, such as planting into a new nation.

For a church plant to be viable, we usually look for **four things** to be in place: a called and capable leader, a core team, finances, and capacity in the movement to support the plant. The other things (core team, finances, and capacity in the movement) are all relatively easy compared to producing called and capable plant leaders. For this reason, helping assess a potential church planter is vital, and forms part of our *Advance Church Planters Course* (ACPC).

12 BIBLICAL PLANTING PRINCIPLES TO APPLY TO ADVANCE

1. THE IMPORTANCE OF STRONG CHURCHES

The Jerusalem church was strong before it ventured beyond Jerusalem. The Antioch church appeared to have a strong five-man eldership team before sending two out to plant a church (Acts 13:1-3). **Application to Advance:** Despite our zeal to plant more churches, we try not to compromise the fundamental strength of existing churches, as this would probably mean a net reduction of the kingdom of God, rather than a net gain.

2. CONVINCED OF BOTH LOCAL AND GLOBAL

The Jerusalem church needed a severe jolt (persecution) to get them engaged beyond the local. Antioch needed a weighty prophetic moment to get them doing the same. Many churches need something similar to be galvanized to wider mission - such as reading this paragraph! Other churches are prone to imbalance the other way, i.e. over-extension that compromises the integrity of the local mission. It must be both/and. **Application to Advance:** We help partner churches understand their obligation to the “glocal” (global and local) scope of The Great Commission.

3. ENSURE GROWTH, NOT RESHUFFLE

Without genuine and consistent gospel proclamation, church plants (and existing churches) can actually fail to truly extend the kingdom of God. Remember, reshuffling existing believers from a sending church to a new church does not necessarily mean anyone actually crosses the line of faith! The new church needs to prioritize evangelism. In Acts 8:4, we read, “*All* who were scattered went about preaching the word” – that’s the way to do it. Paul stressed that he personally baptized the first converts in the Corinthian church plant (1 Cor. 1:14-16) – that’s what church planting should be about. **Application to Advance:** We help partner churches develop integrity and consistency of gospel proclamation. We help partner churches produce gospel-centered and gospel-sharing believers who understand the gospel clearly and are able to share it with others, whether at home-base or part of a church planting team.

4. MULTIPLICATION OF LEADERS

We encourage a “treble it” philosophy, whereby a church endeavors to produce three times the number of leaders that they currently need. The thinking is that you need one group of leaders to lead your church at its current size, another group to cope with increased numbers as your church grows, and another group available to send out to a new church plant. We encourage leadership development at every level, but developing “number 1 church planters,” i.e. men to lead new churches, is our main focus. Philip was an example of a “number 1 church planter,” who successfully planted in Samaria (Acts 8:5). Paul himself was a prolific “number 1 church planter.” Another important group to develop is “support planters,” i.e. those who are part of a church planting team. An example of this would be the Lystra church that generously sent Timothy to the wider mission (Acts 16:1-3). **Application to Advance:** We help partner churches create a church culture that helps train up leaders at every level. We help partner churches identify, prepare, and correctly deploy “number 1 church planters” and “support planters,” and elders, and deacons. Elders, senior leaders and potential “number 1 church planters” and “support planters” are encouraged to attend ACPC.

5. SHORT STRENGTHENING VISITS

Acts 8:14 records that, as the new church in Samaria was being planted, Peter and John came from Jerusalem to pray for these new believers to be filled with the Holy Spirit. Although this point underlines the importance of believers being filled with the Holy Spirit, it is actually about the importance of *short strengthening trips* to help get a new church up and running. **Application to Advance:** We encourage short strengthening visits that build strength into church plants. We encourage all churches to offer their strengths and ask help for their weaknesses. It can be helpful to think in terms of categories, such as administrators, implementers, workplace gurus, discipleship gurus, worship leaders, and Ephesians 4 ministries. What are you good at? What do you need? Every church is strong in at least one area, and able to help strengthen a new church in that area.

6. LONG, REGION-ESTABLISHING DEPLOYMENTS

As well as making short visits to places, Paul sometimes relocated to a place for several years, which resulted in the planting of many churches. For example, his two-year relocation to Ephesus resulted in “all Asia” hearing the gospel (Acts 19:10), no doubt involving the planting of a region of churches in that area. **Application to Advance:** Whenever possible, we try to free up appropriately gifted people for middle-to-long-term deployments to a new region to plant a region of churches. This is often costly, but a highly effective way to work.

7. SYSTEMATIC TRAINING OF LEADERS/PLANTERS

While in Ephesus, Paul taught daily in the Hall of Tyrannus, which resulted in enormous gospel fruit in that region (Acts 19:10). **Application to Advance:** Training of senior leaders and potential church planters is best done together, via programs such as ACPC and various eldership development tracks. Note, we do not want to disempower local churches in terms of their own training, but we believe that training leaders and planters together can complement the internal training that local churches do.

8. BACKING GIFTED REPRODUCERS IN KEY REGIONS

In the book of Acts, it seems that certain combinations of *gifted individuals, and their churches, in key cities*, resulted in various “base churches” emerging as centers for multiplication. For example, the combination of the apostles and their mighty church in Jerusalem resulted in believers being scattered far and wide in Acts 8. Similarly, the combination of Paul and Barnabas in the great city of Antioch resulted in many churches being planted out of the ministry of that church (Acts 13 and 14). We are also told that Thessalonica significantly influenced the surrounding regions (1 Thess. 1:7-8), and we can speculate that Philippi (the “leading city” of Macedonia) became a reproducing hub for Eastern Europe. **Application to Advance:** There is often a noble desire in churches, especially in developed nations, to plant or support churches in underdeveloped and unreached nations. This desire can lead to a well-intentioned, yet non-strategic, possibly even unhelpful, approach. Without stifling credible acts of mission, we encourage partner churches to help raise up and help support *key individuals, based in key churches, in key geographical areas*, in distant nations, who can develop bases from which churches can be planted and strengthened in their nation. This is usually the most strategic way to work, and more fruitful in the long run.

9. CONTRIBUTE FINANCIALLY AND IN PRAYER

New Testament churches contributed both finances and prayer to church plants. **Application to Advance:** We encourage partner churches to sow both finances and prayer into the wider mission. To this end, we work hard on various online communications to boost awareness and prayer; and every partner church contributes financially to the mission. More about this in *Chapter 7*.

10. PARTNERSHIP WITH A TRANS-LOCAL TEAM

The New Testament pattern reveals churches partnering with other churches *and* trans-local teams in order to plant and strengthen churches. This combination of local churches *and* trans-local ministries results in well-founded churches. **Application to Advance:** We want partnership to be productive, enjoyable and based on healthy expectations. We want to emphasize church-to-church connections, as well as help each church meaningfully connect with gifted people who work trans-locally.

11. ROBUST IN THE FACE OF SETBACKS

Acts 16 records two false starts in Asia and Bithynia before the gospel advanced into Philippi in Macedonia. Similarly, Paul needed to defend his church planting season in Thessalonica as not being a failure (1 Thess. 2:1). **Application to Advance:** We try to help planters and their sending churches remain aware of the risks and challenges involved in church planting. We understand that church planting is not an exact science, and that there might be some unexpected turns in the road ahead. We remain loving and loyal to each other and the mission in the face of setbacks, disappointments, and delays.

12. ORGANIZED, FLEXIBLE AND SPIRITUAL

The New Testament planting strategy was a combination of the planned, the spontaneous, and the supernatural. There seemed to be a deliberate plan to target the main cities around the Mediterranean, but the early church also responded well to spontaneous initiatives. Examples include: preaching the gospel when they had to flee Jerusalem (Acts 8), obeying the prompting of the Holy Spirit to send out Barnabas and Paul (Acts 13:1-4), and visiting Macedonia as a result of Paul's dream (Acts 16:9-10). **Application to Advance:** We try to be organized and strategic in our planning, while remaining flexible and open to spontaneous initiatives and the prophetic leadings of the Holy Spirit. We also work to cultivate prophets and prophecy in churches, and in the movement, knowing that this is one of the most important spiritual gifts.

FAQs ABOUT CHURCH PLANTING

ARE CHURCH PLANTS OF AN ADVANCE CHURCH AUTOMATICALLY PART OF ADVANCE? They are until elders are appointed. Then, once there are elders in place, the elders choose whether to continue with Advance or not. If they choose *not* to continue with us, we count it a privilege to have helped them get started; and we bless them on their way. Also, we sometimes support church plants that are not part of Advance (either independent plants or part of another movement); and when we do, there is no expectation that they will join Advance. Please note, however, out of respect for their situation, the kind of support we give a non-Advance plant might differ to the support we give Advance plants.

ARE CHURCH PLANTING AND STRENGTHENING EFFORTS OPTIONAL OR OBLIGATORY FOR PARTNER CHURCHES?

We prefer not to consider it “obligatory,” because it implies a “we have to” attitude rather than “we get to” motivation. We run Advance on a “we get to” motivation, as this reflects the motivation of the gospel. Churches choose to become partner churches, because they are totally convinced by Scripture that normal New Testament Christianity involves church planting and strengthening, and therefore eagerly join in this worthy endeavor. Other than the things we all do together to assist with planting and strengthening (prayer, financial giving, leadership training), each church tries to contribute selflessly to the mission according to their capacity, but without compromising the integrity of their local mission.

HOW CAN I PLANT A CHURCH WITH ADVANCE?

If you are already part of an Advance partner church, you, your local elders, and some Advance leaders need to have a conversation about your aspirations. We will also need to discuss how we can help you test your calling, prepare for it, and support you in it. We recommend our *Advance Church Planters Course* (ACPC) in this regard.

The background is a solid red color with a faint, semi-transparent silhouette of a group of people embracing. The silhouettes are dark against the red background, showing the outlines of heads and shoulders. The overall mood is warm and supportive.

④

STRENGTHENING CHURCHES TOGETHER

WHY?

Alongside planting, the other main feature of the New Testament ministry was the ongoing commitment to strengthen churches. For example:

Peter and John strengthened the new believers in Samaria (Acts 8:14-25).

Peter built up churches in various regions (Acts 9:31-32).

Barnabas relocated to Antioch to strengthen the work there (Acts 11:19-23).

Barnabas recruited Paul to help him strengthen Antioch (Acts 11:25-26).

Prophets from Jerusalem strengthened the Antioch church (Acts 11:27).

Antioch sent an offering for famine relief to Jerusalem (Acts 11:28-30). Macedonia and Achaia also contributed (Rom. 15:25-26), as did Galatia and Corinth (1 Cor. 16:1-3).

Jerusalem released John Mark to help Barnabas and Paul (Acts 12:25).

Lystra released Timothy to help Paul (Acts 16:1-3).

Paul and Barnabas strengthened the souls of the disciples (Acts 14:21-23), and strengthened the churches in Syria and Cilicia (Acts 15:36-41). “The churches were strengthened in the faith” (Acts 16:4-5) and encouraged (Acts 20:1-2).

Paul sent delegates to help strengthen churches (Acts 19:21-22; 1 Cor. 4:15-17; Phil. 2:19-29; 2 Tim. 1:18).

Paul’s dual commitment to planting and strengthening is reflected in his longing to preach Christ where he had not been preached (Rom. 15:20), *and* his longing for Christ to be fully “formed” in believers (Gal. 4:19). Paul implies that local church *strength* is a prerequisite for churches to be *planted* in regions beyond (2 Cor. 10:15-16). Paul knew that if churches were not *well-founded*, they couldn’t easily send the gospel *further*. For example:

Paul *planted* churches in Iconium, Derbe and Lystra, *and* returned twice to *strengthen* them (Acts 14:1, 21; 16:1).

Paul urged the church in Rome to help him *plant* churches in “regions beyond” (Rom. 15:20-24), but he did so on the back of fifteen chapters about *strengthening*.

The fact that the churches on Crete were weak bothered Paul. This caused him to send Titus, one of his leading men, to strengthen these churches. He could have directed Titus’s energy, and the funds that paid for what must have been a costly trip, into *planting* new churches, which would have looked a whole lot better on the website, but he didn’t. Rather, he spent “movement resources” on strengthening these precious churches on Crete.

APPLICATION FOR ADVANCE:

Aware that they are interdependent, we are as committed to *strengthening* churches as we are to *planting* them. This means spending time, money and energy on both *planting* and *strengthening*.

Paul seemed to pour most of his local church strengthening energies into three areas: elders, sound doctrine, and values (correctly applying doctrinal truth to a specific context). Here is how we try to strengthen partner churches in these areas:

STRENGTHENING ELDERS

John Stott says, “The main way to regulate and consolidate the life of a church is to secure for it gifted and conscientious pastoral oversight.”(The Message of 1 Timothy and Titus, IVP, 1996, p. 173) The most strategic way to strengthen a church is to strengthen its elders, who are the existing “people foundation” of a local church. We help strengthen elders by:

HELPING TO APPOINT THE FIRST ELDERS OF A CHURCH PLANT

In a new church, the first aspect of strengthening elders is to help prepare and appoint the first team of elders. Before elders are appointed, the leadership authority of the new church would commonly rest jointly with the pioneer leader and another outside party. This would be either the eldership team of a local church most closely connected to the church plant, or with a trans-local minister who is helping facilitate the church plant. Either way, these parties would work together with the new congregation to identify, develop and appoint the first team of elders.

HELPING THE ELDERS WITH FUTURE ELDERSHIP APPOINTMENTS

Once the first team of elders is appointed, the primary responsibility for identifying, developing and appointing more elders lies with those local elders. However, there is benefit in drawing on outside perspective and affirmation regarding the weighty task of appointing elders.

TARGETED STRENGTHENING OF THEIR AREAS OF NEED

Each local church and eldership team will have specific areas that need strengthening. For example, a church may feel weak in the area of mission, or in being Spirit-empowered, or in a specific doctrine. Once this need is identified, people who are strong in that area can be deployed to help. If an eldership is in some kind of crisis, we would also provide a trusted individual (or two) to help the elders work through things.

GENERAL STRENGTHENING

Most strengthening happens simply through a local church participating in normal “movement life.” Our rhythm of gatherings and our matrix of relationships are designed to provide ongoing support, encouragement, fellowship, and equipping for eldership teams.

LEADERSHIP TRAINING

Partnership allows us to develop resources and train leaders better than if we remained in our own isolated local church silos. While a local eldership team should never abdicate their primary responsibility to develop leaders and elders in their ranks, pooling our energies can provide a welcome boost to local elders.

STRENGTHENING DOCTRINE

The content of Paul's epistles affirms how much Paul wanted his churches to believe correct doctrine and be "pillars of truth" (1 Tim. 3:15). He wanted churches to believe the right things about who God is and how He interacts with mankind. He wanted churches to grasp the full benefits of the New Covenant and the primacy of the church in the heart and plan of God. He wanted churches to correctly understand this present age and the hope we have in the future age. He also called for church leaders and believers to hold fast to truth, to defend truth, and to proclaim truth.

The doctrinal foundations of a local church should certainly be no less or more than the original and unchanging foundation of Scripture. As such, laying doctrinal foundations in a local church today essentially involves helping the church to know and believe the original, universal foundation of Biblical truth. We try and help partner churches become doctrinally strong through:

Relational connection with the church's eldership team – great friends talk about great doctrines.

Advance gatherings that promote doctrinal clarity and courage for those attending.

Recommending various courses and resources.

Our *Statement of Faith* outlines what we consider to be the primary, non-negotiable Biblical doctrines. Partner churches could adopt this Statement of Faith as their own, but it is better for them to use it as a plumb line of truth against which to develop their own, more detailed, Statement of Faith.

STRENGTHENING VALUES

Closely connected to, and yet distinct from, doctrine are *values*. Look at how Paul's concern for churches went beyond sound doctrine into this area of values, "That is why I sent you Timothy, my beloved and faithful child in the Lord, to remind you of my *ways in Christ*, as I teach them everywhere in every church" (1 Cor. 4:17, emphasis mine).

As much as Paul wanted churches to believe sound doctrine, he also wanted them to imitate his *ways in Christ*. "Ways," refer to the *way* doctrine is worked out in life. For example, it is possible for a church to correctly believe in *God's sovereignty*, but for the atmosphere in the church to remain mean, miserable and driven. That church needs no help with the *doctrine* of God's sovereignty, as much as with correctly *applying* God's sovereignty to life. Similarly, some churches pride themselves on proclaiming the one and only true gospel of *God's grace*, yet there are never too many smiles during their times of corporate worship. They don't need help in the *doctrine* of grace, as much as with the way in which they are *applying* grace to life. Proper application should promote praise of God and joy in their lives.

Consider the *Holy Spirit*: Paul wasn't content for a church to have just head knowledge of the doctrine of the Holy Spirit, because he wrote multiple chapters about the *way* we should eagerly and intelligently facilitate the work of the Spirit in church life.

Consider *leadership*: To believe that elders should lead the church is one thing. However, creating healthy leadership values where elders are humble, yet confident, and servant-hearted, yet fearless, takes modeling and impartation, not just a one-dimensional instruction in truth.

In summary, Paul felt a fatherly responsibility to help churches with both *doctrine* and *ways*, which we call *values*. We feel a similar responsibility to help churches develop a compelling set of New Testament *values*. However, the exact way that those values are expressed will differ from church to church, according to the unique personality and context of a local church, and according to the conscience and convictions of the local eldership team. We try and help partner churches develop strong values through:

Relational connections with the church's eldership team - values are often caught, as much as taught.

Advance gatherings that model and impart healthy New Testament values.

Recommending value-rich courses and resources.

Section 5: Beliefs and Values provides an overview of the main Biblical values that all partner churches willingly embrace; although the expression of these values may differ from church to church and context to context.

FAQs ABOUT CHURCH STRENGTHENING

DO SOME CHURCHES NEED MORE STRENGTHENING THAN OTHERS?

Yes. New churches, churches without elders, and churches in crisis or transition, need more help than more mature and stable churches. However, even mature churches need the provocation and encouragement of the wider body.

HOW CAN WE BEST IDENTIFY WHERE OUR CHURCH NEEDS STRENGTHENING AND WHERE WE CAN HELP STRENGTHEN OTHER CHURCHES?

It can be helpful to think about this using some kind of grid. For example, think of the core values of Advance: Gospel-centered, Mission-focused, Disciple-making, Spirit-empowered, and Elder-led. Ask yourselves which two of these five is your church strongest in, and which two is your church weakest in? Then, look for opportunities to help other churches in your areas of strength, and actively seek help in your areas of weakness. Worship, prayer, administration, hospitality and operating in the gifts of the Holy Spirit are just a few of the many areas where we are working to strengthen one another.



5

BELIEFS AND VALUES

STATEMENT OF FAITH

Our Statement of Faith outlines what we consider to be the primary, non-negotiable, Biblical doctrines that we believe, as partner churches. Churches are free to adopt this Statement of Faith as their own or, even better, to use it as a plumb line against which to develop their own, more detailed Statement of Faith. This is the Statement of Faith of the Evangelical Alliance of the UK. For us, it adequately captures the main beliefs that Advance partner churches subscribe to.

WE BELIEVE IN:

The one true God, who lives eternally in three persons - the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit.

The love, grace and sovereignty of God in creating, sustaining, ruling, redeeming and judging the world.

The divine inspiration and supreme authority of the Old and New Testament Scriptures, which are the written Word of God - fully trustworthy for faith and conduct.

The dignity of all people, made male and female in God's image, to love, be holy and care for creation; yet corrupted by sin, which incurs divine wrath and judgment.

The incarnation of God's eternal son, the Lord Jesus Christ, born of the virgin, Mary; truly divine and truly human, yet without sin.

The atoning sacrifice of Christ on the cross: dying in our place, paying the price for sin and defeating evil - and so reconciling us with God.

The bodily resurrection of Christ, the first fruits of our resurrection, his ascension to the Father, and his reign and mediation as the only savior of the world.

The justification of sinners solely by the grace of God, through faith in Christ.

The ministry of God, the Holy Spirit, who leads us to repentance, unites us with Christ through new birth, empowers our discipleship and enables our witness.

The Church, the body of Christ (both local and universal,) the priesthood of all believers - given life by the Spirit and endowed with the Spirit's gifts to worship God and proclaim the gospel, promoting justice and love.

The personal and visible return of Jesus Christ to fulfill the purposes of God, who will raise all people to judgment, bring eternal life to the redeemed and eternal condemnation to the lost, and establish a new heaven and new earth.

WATER BAPTISM

Advance is a credo-Baptist movement. We believe baptism is an appeal of faith made by the person being baptized and a physical picture of the spiritual reality of our union with Christ. *If you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved* (Romans 10:9).

Baptism is a “closed hand” issue for us, for to be an unbaptized follower of Jesus makes no sense Biblically, theologically or historically. However, the mode of baptism is an “open hand” issue. Full immersion is the method of baptism that adheres to Biblical description and the meaning of the word, therefore we would expect Advance partner churches to practice baptism by full immersion unless for medical reasons this is impossible. However, assuming the individual had a true confession of faith we would also see sprinkling as a valid mode of baptism - it is the declaration of faith that counts more than the amount of water.

Our understanding of baptism means that we do not recognize infant baptism as true baptism. We would encourage those baptized as infants who subsequently come to true faith in Christ to then undergo true baptism.

Our expectation of Advance partner churches is that they share these convictions and practices. However, we also recognize that some partner churches may decide to admit into membership those who have been baptized as infants. This would not be general practice but a desire to extend generosity towards those who have *genuine* theological conviction about paedobaptism and covenant theology. We would not want our convictions to lead to local churches forcing someone to be baptized against their theological conviction. This would mean they were being baptized for our sake rather than as an act of faith in Christ and would do damage to conscience. But we would also expect that partner churches would not appoint to eldership and other senior leadership positions those who espouse paedobaptism, as to do so would compromise our convictions on this issue.

VALUES

We have five foundational, imperative values that all partner churches eagerly embrace. While we value many things (see the page that follows), we have chosen the following five values as our “top 5.” This is not only because we believe that these five values are very important, but because the blend of these five values is what gives Advance her unique personality. However, the local application of these values differs from church to church, depending on the conviction of the local elders and their context.

GOSPEL-CENTERED

“Gospel-centered” refers to the Biblical philosophy of ministry that keeps the gospel message at the center of all ministry, whether to believers or unbelievers. Belief in the gospel is the means by which we *enter* God’s kingdom; and it is also the means by which we make *progress* in the kingdom. The good news of the gospel - that we can be saved from the wrath of God - contains both the power and motivation for salvation, and everything within salvation. We desire local churches to help unbelievers and believers increasingly believe and apply the gospel to every area of their lives.

MISSION-FOCUSED

We are convinced that God intends churches to be outward-focused mission agencies (both locally and globally); and that he intends all believers to be fishers of men. As such, we desire local churches to specifically equip and inspire their members to win people to Christ. We also desire the church community to be on mission more broadly by way of society-serving initiatives and church planting.

DISCIPLE-MAKING

Because Jesus himself made disciples and commissioned all believers to make disciples, our goal is for every believer to become a *disciple-making disciple*. We desire local churches to actively make disciple-making disciples who know, love and obey Jesus. Courses and tools might help, but discipleship happens via intentional relationships, as well as via small groups that prioritize this.

SPIRIT-EMPOWERED

We believe that local churches should be in eager and intelligent pursuit of the presence, power, fruit and gifts of God's Spirit, as mentioned in the Bible. We believe that all believers should heed the Biblical call to be filled with the Spirit, and remain filled, throughout their lives.

ELDER-LED

We believe that churches should be led by a called and capable team of elders with a team leader who is "first among equals." This team of elders should lovingly guard, guide and govern the church. Elders are the highest human authority over a local church, but we encourage elders towards meaningful connection with one or two respected outside voices in Advance to help them fulfill their calling.

The Biblical expectation is that elders are male. In this regard, Advance is complementarian. We believe in Biblically qualified, male, eldership. In partner churches, all men and women are encouraged to flourish in their gifts – including leadership gifts – but only a few men will be qualified by character and gift to serve in the office of elder.

While we partner around similar doctrine and values (such as our value of complementarity), eldership teams are encouraged to work out the detail of how these values are expressed in their local churches. For example, across all partner churches, elders are responsible for directional, authoritative preaching, but occasionally, on pertinent themes, some Advance churches will have women speak to the gathered church.

Similarly, all our partner churches have a value of elders and their wives being meaningfully engaged in ministry together, both in their local church, and in our wider Advance partnership. Of course, there is no office of "wife of elder," but if an elder's wife doesn't carry the church in her heart it will be difficult for him to function effectively as an elder, and will likely place strain on their marriage. Exactly how this looks and is worked out will vary from church to church and from couple to couple – Advance does not seek to legislate in these matters.

Churches that are exploring partnership with Advance often ask about other things that we value dearly. They also ask about the kind of "feel" that we think a New Testament-type church would have in today's world. To this end, here are another fifteen Biblical values that we warmly encourage, and try to help churches to pursue.

1. Enjoying God's grace and sovereignty
2. Encouraging faith-filled exploits
3. Prioritizing and preaching the Bible
4. Worshiping wholeheartedly
5. Prioritizing prayer
6. Cultivating a family culture
7. Celebrating diversity
8. Nurturing a healthy home-life
9. Excelling in financial generosity
10. Observing believers' baptism and communion
11. Modeling servant-leadership
12. Pursuing societal renewal
13. Loving mercy and doing justice
14. Honoring other churches
15. Meaningful wider partnership



6

LEADERSHIP

WHO AND WHERE?

GLOBAL TEAM

This team provides impetus for our global mission, guards our vision and values, oversees movement finance and communication, and helps develop leadership in different continents and regions. The Global Team hosts a major gathering called *Advance Global Leadership Conference* every one or two years. All lead elders and their wives from partner churches are asked to attend (and other leaders in their churches are most welcome), as well as leaders from churches who might be exploring partnership with Advance.

CONTINENT TEAMS

We currently have continent leadership teams in Africa, Europe, North America, and Asia. These teams provide impetus for the mission on their continents, oversee continent finance and communication, and help develop leadership in different hubs. Each Continent Team hosts an annual gathering, open to all who lead partner churches on their continent (and sometimes further afield), as well as those exploring partnership with Advance.

HUB TEAMS

These teams help connect partner churches in smaller regions, such as states, provinces or cities. Once there are a reasonable number of churches in a hub, the hub becomes the main environment where partnership is expressed. While hubs are not isolated units, churches in the same hub will get to know each other well. This will happen as they *plant and strengthen* together for the good of their region, and work with other hubs for the good of their country and continent. Each hub will operate slightly differently, depending on their context. However, minimally, they will all facilitate fellowship, training, support (strengthening), and planting efforts.

TASK TEAMS

In addition to these broader leadership teams, we also form Task Teams, when required, for projects such as the *Advance Church Planters Course* (ACPC), Finance, and Communications.

GEOGRAPHY, GIFTING AND RELATIONSHIP

Leaders emerge according to their gifting, character, and fruitfulness. While geographical location is a factor, giftedness is a greater factor. For example, we don't just appoint a leader in every geographical area simply because we "need one." If there isn't a suitably gifted person in a certain region (such as a continent or hub), then a suitably gifted person will provide leadership from further afield, until someone emerges locally.

This external leader will empower various people locally with appropriate responsibilities so that the local mission can move forward. Therefore, although the current names of our teams are geographical (global, continental, and hub), they are actually more defined by a suitably gifted leader/team than the geography. However, geographical names are simpler, so we use them where we can.

Also, we do not restrict people's ministry or relationships on the basis of geography. For example, if an Advance leader in California planted a church in Germany, or developed a relationship with a church in Germany, he might play the primary role in the Advance mission in that nation, even though the "Advancers" in the UK are geographically closer to Germany than he is. In time, he might wean his relationships in Germany onto Advance UK, but the point is that *relationship* is more important than *geography*.

As we plant churches and grow, we might adjust our terminology to better reflect how we are working. This is dependent on *both* geographical doors that the Lord may open, and leaders that He may raise up. Therefore, our terminology for leadership and regions needs to remain flexible.

LEADERSHIP VALUES

AUTHORITY

The New Testament teaches that local elders are the highest human authority in the local church. Therefore, authority in a local church lies with the local elders, not with the movement. However, we also see that New Testament churches enjoyed meaningful connection with suitably gifted trans-local individuals and other churches, and afforded them significant influence in their churches.

RELATIONSHIP

In keeping with the atmosphere of New Testament church, we have a relational approach to leadership. *Genuine relationship* is one of our four pillars of partnership (see *Chapter 2 The Power of Partnership*). A relational approach to leadership has many benefits, including raising levels of trust, which makes it easier for local elders to be receptive to external influence.

SERVANT-HEARTEDNESS

The Advance leadership ethos is to imitate Jesus, who came not to be served, but to serve. We go the extra mile for each other, always seeking what is best for one another, the local church, and our shared mission.

TEAM

Although the Bible never actually uses the word, “team,” the concept is certainly seen throughout the Bible. God himself is a “team” (the Trinity). Jesus usually had a team around him, and sent his disciples out in teams of two. Local elderships are teams. The apostle Paul was constantly working with teams of different shapes and sizes. Common sense and experience provide great reasons to prioritize working in teams, as do accountability, sustainability, friendship, and the benefit of the strength and breadth of gifting. To this end, we take *team* seriously - sometimes even foregoing opportunities for speedy advance, for the sake of strengthening a team. We see Paul do this in 2 Cor. 2:12-13. This means that we do not let the movement as a whole, or a particular church, become overly dependent on one person.

ACCOUNTABILITY

The plurality and accountability of a local eldership team goes a long way to self-correcting internal blind spots and weaknesses, but not the whole way. A humble and wise eldership team will give a “standing invitation” (more on this below) to one or two trusted Advance leaders to answer, at least in part, the Roman poet, Satires’, question, “Quis custodiet ipsos custodiet?” (Who guards the guards?). All those who serve churches in Advance are rooted in and accountable to their local eldership team and the movement’s leadership teams.

SUITABLY GIFTED

There are three challenges in trying to work out who is suitably gifted to lead a movement, and lead within a movement. First, unlike with local elders, the Bible doesn’t give a clear list of characteristics for such roles. We presume that, minimally, they should display the same characteristics as local elders. Yet, what in addition to that?”

Secondly, the obvious Biblical prototype for movement leadership was the apostle, Paul, and those who helped him. However, while there is much we can imitate from Paul and his friends, there are some things that we cannot. Thirdly, experience shows that the seemingly obvious choice for movement leader (e.g. the man who leads the biggest church in the movement, or the most loved leader in the movement) is often not suitably gifted to lead a movement. How then are we to decide *who* should lead a modern-day movement of churches? If churches naturally begin to form behind a certain individual/team, that may well indicate that the individual/team is suitably gifted. Yet, the question remains: is there a Biblical grid to help us discern who should lead a movement?

We believe the most helpful “gift grid” is probably the gifts mentioned in Ephesians 4:11: apostle, prophet, evangelist, and pastor-teacher. We believe that all these ministries still exist today *in a certain form*, “to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building of the body of Christ, until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ...when each part is working properly, [making] the body grow so that it builds itself up in love” (Eph. 4:12-16). It would be poor exegesis to pick and choose which of the gifts in this list are in play today, and overly optimistic to say that the church has reached the place of “until,” fully mature and no longer in need of these gifts! Clearly, these gifts will be needed in every generation to build up the body of Christ, until Christ returns.

We believe that these gifts, working together, provide a suitably gifted and balanced team to lead a movement that is devoted to the primary New Testament tasks of planting and strengthening churches. We are not saying that every leadership team in Advance (global, continental, and hub) consist exclusively of people with these gifts, nor that these gifts don’t exist outside of our recognized teams. Nevertheless, broadly speaking, we are saying that we try to develop and deploy Ephesians 4 gifts to lead and influence the movement.

We are careful not to overstate the importance of Ephesians 4 ministries; and we know that many other spiritual gifts are needed in the mix. We are also slow to “label” anyone, as it often takes many years to discern who is gifted in what way. *However, if we disown Ephesians 4 ministries, we are left with the unnerving scenario of having to invent our own extra-Biblical specifications and vocabulary for those who serve churches from the “outside,” and help churches partner together.* While there are challenges associated with working out how Ephesians 4 ministries work today, there are *greater* challenges with thinking that we can make extra-Biblical decisions about who is gifted to lead movements today. In view of the contemporary disagreements regarding Ephesians 4 ministries, a few important things need to be said:

Unlike the original apostles and prophets, Ephesians 4 ministries today do not write Scripture, or lay (or try to re-lay) the foundations of the universal church. Nor do they act with the kind of authority appropriate only for those who were personally commissioned by Christ to shape the original generation of the church. However, similarly to New Testament times, Ephesians 4 gifts are still required to help the church *in each generation* reach *maturity* and be on *mission*. Every new church plant needs to be dynamically founded on the original foundation that was laid by the original generation of Ephesians 4 gifts and the word of God. New churches and their leaders can be significantly helped in this regard when served by the Ephesians 4 gifts. An *apostolic gift* may provide them with fatherly security and wisdom in terms of building; a *prophetic gift* may help them develop a healthy life of the Spirit and provoke them in the purposes of God; an *evangelistic gift* may equip them to better reach the lost; and a *seasoned pastor-teacher* may help care for them, develop them in sound doctrine, and help the local elders mature as local pastor-teachers themselves. It seems rather foolish to imagine that any eldership team, particularly a new one in a new church, can maximize their potential without some outside help from suitably gifted people – this is the power of the body of Christ.

Since, in certain contexts, some of the Ephesians 4 gifts are more contentious than others, we *adjust our language* to promote unity, while still being faithful to our convictions. We usually opt for generic phrases, such as, “trans-local ministry,” rather than always using Ephesians 4 language. If we do refer to a person’s unique area of giftedness, we usually refer to it as an adjective, rather than a noun, e.g. *apostolic*, or *prophetic*, or *evangelistic* ministry.

Because local elders are the highest human authority in a local church, Ephesians 4 ministries today:

Promote *timeless, foundational Biblical doctrine and values*, and leave the local elders to determine how such doctrine and values are expressed in their church.

Are *functional, not positional*. The original apostles and prophets had positional authority over all churches (and still do, through the Scripture that some of them wrote). However, such ministries today are only legitimized by actually functioning in a certain church/churches. Therefore, an individual might be considered “apostolic” by a certain church, but not by others.

Are *invited* by the local elders, not *imposed* on them. While trans-local ministry is invited by partner churches not imposed, partner churches will give the Advance leaders (usually one or two men in particular) a *standing invitation* to speak into their eldership team. This doesn’t mean that they will show up unannounced (!), but it does mean that they will lovingly watch your back. This is a joy and a privilege for a local church. Think of when the Galatians drifted into legalism. They were so far into legalism that they didn’t even realize it. They were in so much trouble that they didn’t even realize they were in trouble. Yet, because they had given Paul a standing invitation, Paul and his team kept a loving eye on them, and got involved as soon as they discerned their drift. The Galatian elders must have slept well at night knowing that someone who loved them had their back. By becoming a partner church, the local elders are issuing this kind of standing invitation to the Advance team.



7

FINANCE

THREE GUIDING PRINCIPLES

Scripture leaves us considerable latitude in how we organize our finances for our shared mission. Here is how we have chosen to do it:

EXCELLENCE IN THE GRACE OF GIVING

We are not embarrassed to provoke churches to excellence in the grace of giving (2 Cor. 8:7), both for their local mission and our wider mission.

THE VAST MAJORITY OF OUR POOLED FINANCE GOES TO PLANTING AND STRENGTHENING

There may be times when movement funds are given to crisis relief or ministry to the poor, but we believe these areas are better handled at the local church or hub level.

EMPOWERMENT OF BOTH PARTNER CHURCHES AND THE MOVEMENT LEADERSHIP

If the movement asks local elders for too much money, local elders will feel dis-empowered in giving directly to situations of their choice. Yet, if the movement has insufficient funds, *it* feels disempowered. Therefore, we need a way forward that both empowers and resources *both* local elders and the movement.

WHAT AMOUNTS GO WHERE

We *encourage* partner churches to sow at least **10%** of their monthly income towards church planting and ministry to the poor, under the oversight of their local eldership team. We understand it may take some churches time to work up to this level, but we warmly encourage churches in this direction.

We *ask* partner churches to sow **2%** (i.e. a fifth of the 10% that they are giving away) of their annual income (of standard tithes and offerings or 'unrestricted' income) to **our shared global mission**. This money is used for planting and strengthening initiatives around the world, particularly endeavors that are outside the reach of a church or region of churches (hub or continent). We endeavor to keep an approximate 50/50 split between planting and strengthening. In the event of excess income building up in this account, the surplus is given to church planting.

We also ask partner churches to sow between **1% and 3%** (elders decide the exact amount) to the **Advance mission** on their continent and in their hubs to plant and strengthen churches.

Although many churches regard these numbers (2% and 1-3%) as very small, we want elders to feel empowered to give money away *directly* to causes that they support. Assuming that they are giving away at least **10%** of their income, this arrangement empowers them with 5%+ to sow elsewhere.

Partner churches know that a contribution to Advance means a contribution to church planting and strengthening. Therefore, partner churches don't begrudge sowing money into Advance. *Our mission is their mission...is our mission.*

OTHER THINGS TO NOTE

We have high levels of accountability for global and continental funds, including detailed and transparent annual reports and audits where appropriate.

WE TRY TO MAKE ALL ADVANCE EVENTS SELF-FUNDING

We encourage partner churches to pay their own way in terms of travel, conferences and other costs associated with our mission. We encourage eldership teams to have a line item in the budget to *fund the travel of the lead couple and other eldership couples* to Advance gatherings and initiatives. We also ask them to consider their spending in this area *a priority*, because the health of the lead couple and the eldership couples might be the most important investment that a church can make. Where necessary, we encourage *better-resourced churches to consider coming alongside less-resourced churches* to help their lead couple and other key leaders to attend key gatherings and conferences. Churches that need assistance are encouraged to ask for help from other partner churches, because we are in this together and love to help each other out.

Under normal circumstances, and where possible, the travel costs of Advance team members, or those ministering, are paid for by the receiving continent, hub or local church(s). However, our culture is that it is more blessed to give than receive, therefore we encourage fighting for the privilege of paying!

Honorariums: We encourage a culture of honor and generosity, as we see in the Bible, but we have no Advance policy concerning honorariums. It is up to churches/hubs/continents to do as they see fit.



8

EXPECTATIONS AND JOINING

EXPECTATIONS

The simplest way to explain partnership is to say that partner churches *actively and joyfully live out and promote our four pillars of partnership* which are:

- Similar doctrine and values
- Shared mission (planting and strengthening churches)
- Genuine relationship
- Suitably gifted (and recognized) leadership

A careful reading of these documents, coupled with time spent talking with other Advance leaders and time spent at Advance gatherings, will help a church understand partnership.

JOINING

Although our assessment of potential partner churches is thorough, it happens via *relationship*. A relational approach is best because:

It's the most *comprehensive* approach - alignment "on paper" can easily miss crucial elements. Also, it is impossible to cover every eventuality and answer every question on paper.

It honors the nature of the church as a *family*, something Advance is passionate about. It also draws the church into relationships in the movement before they become a partner church.

It means that we can *tailor the journey* towards partnership to best serve the particular church, context and culture.

Here are some suggested steps towards partnership. All of these except the first and final steps can happen in any order:

Interest: A church expresses interest in Advance.

Read: The entire eldership team should carefully read this booklet.

Visit us: As many of the elders as possible should visit several Advance gatherings, particularly *hub* gatherings, *continent* gatherings and, ideally, our *global* gathering. These gatherings will help you understand Advance, help you make friends and help you get a sense of whether Advance is the family that the Lord wants you to join.

Have us visit you: In ordinary circumstances, a couple of Advance leaders (usually someone from the *continent* team and another local leader) will try to visit your church, meet your team, answer questions and get a feel for the culture of your church, to help work out if Advance will be a good fit for you.

Talk thoroughly through alignment issues: Although there will be many smaller conversations along the way, there needs to be one big conversation between all your elders (not just the leader) and the Advance leaders who are helping your church towards partnership. In this conversation, *both parties should be double-checking that there is sufficient alignment for partnership around our four pillars of partnership.* Use these questions as a basic guideline for this conversation.

Have all your elders read all this booklet, and have you discussed it as a team?

With regards to each document, what aspects are you most excited about? What aspects are you most concerned about? Are there any aspects that you disagree with or which you feel you cannot give yourselves to wholeheartedly?

Are there any other questions, concerns or ideas that you have? And are there any other questions or concerns that we have from the Advance “side?”

ACKNOWLEDGMENT OF PARTNERSHIP

While we don’t subscribe to “signing on the dotted line,” we are clear that partnership is a serious thing, and a moment that both parties should be clear about, and should celebrate. To this end, we ask that your eldership team email Advance expressing your decision to join our partnership. We will then communicate to the Advance family that you have become a partner church by email/website, and introduce you and pray for you in person at the next suitable Advance gathering.

Note that, in terms of *time frame*, our priority is to be *thorough*, rather than quick. When it comes to testing our four pillars of partnership, only the first one (similar doctrine and values) may be aligned quickly, while the others (shared mission; genuine relationship; suitably gifted and recognized leadership) will take some time to develop/test. In most cases, the journey to partnership takes a year or two.

FAQs ABOUT EXPECTATIONS, JOINING AND LEAVING

WHAT IS REQUIRED IN TERMS OF TRAVEL FOR PASTORS AND ELDERS OF PARTNER CHURCHES?

We find that pastors/elders significantly benefit in different ways through connecting with Advance in each sphere (hub, continent and global). Even elders who are well-connected locally find it very enlarging to connect at the global level. Therefore, we ask that minimally the lead elder and his wife attend the *Advance Global Leadership Conference*, although all leaders are welcome. Our hope is that even more elders and leaders can get to the continent and hub gatherings.

HOW MANY VISITS WILL A PARTNER CHURCH RECEIVE?

Firstly, it depends on the *needs of the church* - churches without elders, or in crisis or in transition, will need more input. Secondly, it depends on *the ability of the church to receive input* through other modes (churches need be able to receive input at Advance gatherings [2 Tim. 2:2] and through other resources). Thirdly, it depends on the *availability of people and financial resources*. Fourthly, it depends on the *size and effectiveness of the hub*.

IS BECOMING A PARTNER A MOMENT OR A PROCESS?

It is a *process* that ends with a moment. Relational connection and value alignment take time, but there will come a *moment* when partnership is acknowledged.

WHAT IS THE PROCESS FOR A CHURCH TO LEAVE ADVANCE VOLUNTARILY?

It is as simple as making both Advance and your local church aware that your church is leaving Advance. In light of our value of brotherhood (and common decency), any disagreements should come to light very early on, giving everyone unhurried time to resolve it, hopefully in a favorable outcome for all concerned.

UNDER WHAT CIRCUMSTANCES MIGHT A CHURCH BE INVOLUNTARILY REMOVED FROM ADVANCE?

This would probably only happen if, after unhurried and brotherly discussion, it became clear that there was a significant compromise around any of our four pillars of partnership, namely; *doctrine* and *values, shared mission* or *genuine relationship*, or if there was a clear deficit of respect for the leadership of Advance.



