

National Ministries



Mike Dittman
Director of
National Ministries

Let's Pray...About Our Vision

It's all about relationships

Our missional vision of loving God (experiencing beauty and wholeness), loving one another (embracing intimacy and belonging), and loving the world (extending adventure and purpose) is primarily a relational call to prayer. So...Let's Pray! This mission for starting and strengthening churches that are spiritually alive, relationally connected, and missionally engaged is truly a vision for a new kind of connection with God, one another, and the world. Jesus's Gospel of the Kingdom is a new kind of community. That's why the New Testament calls it a new covenant, a new commandment, and a new commission. This new way of loving and relating is simply the three dynamics/disciplines that Jesus lived (John 15 and 1 John 2:6) and taught his disciples to pray (Luke 11:14).

As your National Ministries director, I want to stay focused on who God has called me to be and what he has called me to do on behalf of the UBIC. Likewise, I want our pastors and planters, along with their church leaders, to be clear about the way God has wired them and the specific race that he has called them to run or the specific position that he wants them to play. Though some of us may be at different stages on the journey, we all have another tour of duty to fulfill until he says, "Well done good and faithful servant!"

Caring for the Hearts of our Pastors

- *What does this mean for me personally?* Since half my life is lived in my car and half my life is lived in my house, I have been developing/implementing a healthier lifestyle pattern that is consistent on the road and at home. This involves new routines of diet and exercise as well as solitude and community. How can we encourage our pastors to see beyond their ministry role and realize that taking care of themselves physically, emotionally, relationally, and spiritually is vitally important to their role as a pastor? This has been an important role I have played as I have spent time encouraging pastors over this past year.

- *What does this mean for our pastors and their church leaders?* We are encouraging them to build sacred rhythms (spiritual disciplines) into their lives and relationships. Taking a sabbatical is a huge step in helping our pastors get off their "treadmills" and out of their "fishbowls" for some needed rest, reflection, and renewal. When the sabbaticals are well designed, they can help our pastors and their church leaders (vocational, bi-vocational, or co-vocational) to find Jesus in new ways. Just talk to Pastor Mark Wilson from Fowlerville, Mich., or Pastor Greg Reed from Kokomo, Ind., among many, who have done this with amazing results.

- *What does this life of the heart or walk of prayer mean for all of us?* The mantra for our leaders is, "Follow me as I follow Christ!" This is a calling to relationship that ends up focusing our lives on prayer. We are to walk as Jesus did (1 John 2:6). He walked in the Spirit with his Father as he experienced a sense of peace, presence, and purpose. He called his leaders to that same life of prayer. In John 15, Jesus explains his three dynamics and disciplines for walking with God. In Luke 11:1-4, he teaches his disciples to pray in the same three areas. This life of the heart or walk of prayer will continue to be the focus for pastors and their church leaders. We have not merely initiated a season of prayer, but are building a culture or lifestyle of prayer. We want prayer (Jesus) to be our passion, our priority, our pattern!

There is Hope - There is Help

Ministry takes quite a toll on the soul and surfaces issues in our hearts that need addressing. This is a true reality whether you are a vocational or bi-vocational pastor, licensed minister or board member. Leadership is leadership and regardless of what your title is, it takes a toll on your soul! As a result, many churches and pastors struggle with isolation and loneliness, pride and shame, discouragement and depression, confusion and insecurity. Our annual reports, cluster conversations, and church assessments are a few ways for us to see the

Let's Pray!



red flags. Symptoms like spiritual apathy, unresolved conflict, lack of vision, or declining numbers/finances can indicate that you are a church in crisis. Symptoms like isolation, anger, depression, bitterness, gambling, gluttony, sleeping problems, spending sprees, along with various other addictions are cause for concern with pastors or church leaders. If you are a church or pastor in crisis or transition, then give us a call. There's help. You're never alone!

Through our Soul Care Prayer Retreats and Strategic Prayer Renewal Cohorts, as well as a lot of personal mentoring conversations, our pastors/planters and church leaders are beginning to cultivate daily routines of returning to their first love (Revelation 2:4-5), being continually filled with the Holy Spirit (Ephesians 5:18-22) and praying without ceasing (1 Thessalonians 5:16-18). Through our website, mailings, events, cluster meetings, and many personal conversations, we are fostering our vision and values. The wind is blowing, so let's keep our sails up!

Please Pray for Us...

- We need God's wisdom to determine when churches need revitalization, or whether they should close and use their prayerfulness and resources to see something brand new to begin, a fresh start. We also need prayer to discern when pastors need renewal or retooled, and which of our growing churches need to grow outward (broader), rather than upward (bigger) or how they can support or start new churches.
- We are continually in the process of training our cluster leaders, PMLT and ELT members, as well as others, who can assess the true condition of our pastors and their churches, as well as develop healthy pathways for them to become more spiritually alive in Christ, relationally connected to one another, and missionally engaged in the world.

Hearing Vs. Owning

Hearing our (his) vision is different than *owning* the vision. The former can be understood intellectually, but the latter requires a whole life involvement. Agreeing about the vision is different than owning it for ourselves. Real ownership of vision only occurs through personal engagement and practical experience. Our worldviews, assumptions, and mindsets aren't molded in us through a lecture or a book, but through images and convictions built in our hearts through life experiences. Therefore, they cannot be changed through mere words. It takes prayerful intercession, personal interaction, and practical application.

I think that is why Jesus sent out his Apostles (Luke 10). When people are in new settings and having to do things that they have never done before, it causes them to ask a different set of questions and requires them to desperately pray. That's why church planting (which is like a long-term mission trip) causes people to rethink their convictions, grow in their character and cultivate a new connection with God and others.

For some of us, this GUM (Gospel, Unity, and Mission) vision is becoming a core conviction that's beginning to move our hearts to sacrificial action, but for others it is still a catchy phrase on the wall. We sincerely want to know if you are understanding and living Jesus' mission to build communities of wholeness, belonging, and purpose. Are you clear about what we are moving toward, what our target is all about, what we are actually trying to start and strengthen? We want to know if you are building strong convictions or are simply confused. Let's embrace the Gospel, Unity and Mission as we hoist our sails!

Has our missional vision for relationship (starting and strengthening churches that are spiritually alive in Christ, relationally connected to one another, and missionally engaged in the world) been clearly communicated? How much ownership does your pastor and church have, and what are the ways you all have embodied it? In what ways may you still be confused about it? Do you have any comments, questions, or suggestions? If so please send them to us.



Let's Pray...About Our Strategy

It's all about leadership

Our ministry strategy for starting and strengthening churches is primarily focused on equipping church planters and pastors to build leadership teams. Our governing assumption is that fruitful churches require healthy leaders (teams of shepherding servants who model and mentor spiritual maturity). Let's build disciple-making communities within our neighborhoods and among our nations.

The wind is blowing as we have hoisted our sails. The wind is out of our control. The Holy Spirit will blow when and where he chooses (many times in response to our prayers). We are only responsible and accountable to hoisting the sails, he takes care of everything else!

To help our pastors/planters walk with God, make disciples and plant churches, we provide assessments, training, licensing, encouragement, and mentoring. This is done through our ongoing cluster system, as well as our short-term specialized cohorts and coaching. We are committed to helping our pastors and planters develop the biblical foundations, spiritual disciplines, and ministry competencies needed to start and strengthen fruitful churches.

Our equipping philosophy is related to the apprentice model of Jesus. It is a very personal and relational approach that requires more time with fewer people. We have found this to have a far deeper and long-lasting impact. The Jesus model of equipping leaders is less about giving them a book or a lecture and more about telling stories and asking questions. He provided an example and invited them into action. His apprenticeship involved the whole person. His lessons required a lot of time, courage, humility, and vulnerability. As you can tell, it was not a corporate business model that focused on efficiency and productivity, but more about spiritual maturity and relational community.

- I have walked alongside our 24 cluster leaders as they have walked alongside their pastors and churches who are in crisis or transition.
- 215 pastors with their church leaders and spouses have been able to participate in the soul-care prayer retreats.
- Through the ministry of strategic prayer renewal, we will have been able to coach 38 pastors/leaders.
- We are trying to bring our encouragement and engagement with churches/pastors beyond the programmatic events, into a "face to face and heart to heart" connection. Over 20 Michigan UB churches and 24 pastors have been pursued by one of our ELT members. Matt McConnell and his wife Kristi have sensed God's calling to visit UB churches on Sundays and reach out to pastors throughout the week for prayer and encouragement.
- We have been able to mentor 12 pastors to our church planting cohorts, supervised field internships, and leadership team mentor residencies.
- 16 pastors are working in The Barnabas Project as prayer warriors or coaches in training.
- Cluster leaders began their training in the Fresh Start Initiative and the Barnabas Project at our winter gathering.

Our strategy for strengthening and starting churches is rooted in prayer and focused on leadership training and team development. We have many examples of this, but I want to highlight two of our pastoring teams. These two teams exemplify a commitment to starting and strengthening churches by creating healthy leadership teams. Greg Reed and Lissa Litka (Morningstar Church, Kokomo, Ind.) along with Randy Carpenter and Kelly Ball (Colwood UB, Caro, Mich.) are two examples of copastors who are working to build their elder teams. These are men and women who are brothers and sisters in Christ and are equipping their leadership teams.

Strengthening (or Revitalizing) Existing Churches

Strengthening or revitalizing existing churches is less about getting better facilities, better programs, or better organizational structures and systems. Although these factors are important, the primary challenge rests in evaluating and cultivating the biblical dynamics of spiritual vitality, relational integrity, and missional ministry.

In the process of strengthening or revitalizing existing churches, our focus is always on leadership dynamics. Just like a healthy biological family is based on the personal and relational maturity of the marriage, caregivers and parents, so it is with the church family.

Our clusters are designed to not only be a place for mutual encouragement, but where pastors can help one another strengthen their lives, families, and ministries. Alongside our cluster leaders we have developed a



very simple, intense, and transformational process for assessing churches and pastors who are at various levels of challenge or opportunity, and then developing healthy pathways forward. This is what we have done and what you can expect:

1. Our team will come to do a one- or two-day assessment in which we meet with every leader and their spouse if available. These meetings are confidential, and a lot can be processed that never gets talked about in larger group meetings. It's amazing how much the spouses have incredible insight into the dynamics of what's going on. We also use this individual time for any kind of personal encouragement that needs to happen as well. These times are very personal, prayerful, and powerful!

2. At the end of this assessment, we meet with the leadership team to share our findings and collaborate together about a pathway toward healing, renewal, reconciliation, and growth. Through this process we determine whether the pastor needs the encouragement and courage to just move ahead, personal renewal, ministry training, or transition to a better fit. Through this process we also need to determine whether a church can be revitalized or needs to think about how to close and use their prayers/financial resources for a fresh start church.

3. There are many avenues of follow-up with the National Director, cluster leader, PMLT or ELT members as well as specialized coaching from our strategic partners.

One of our strategic partners is Dan Kopp who has established The Barnabas Project. It's our desire that every pastor who needs to be coached can be coached. This is a great support to our cluster system.

Dan has provided a web presence that clearly outlines what The Barnabas Project is all about and how it can help you. He has developed a prayer team and is in the process of providing pastoral coaching while training several to be Barnabas coaches. Most of his training and supervision is done online or by phone. The cluster leaders experienced one of his four-hour training sessions at their Winter Gathering, and he will do a similar training for anyone that is interested at our National Conference. Dan is in the process of following up with potential Barnabas coaches in order to provide personalized training while he oversees the Barnabas coaching network.

Starting (or Restarting) New Churches

The cynicism and skepticism of starting new churches is being replaced with optimism and motivation. We aren't just hoping, dreaming, talking, and planning, we are actually doing! We are planting a wide range of disciple-making communities in various places. We are starting traditional churches and simple churches (small communities that meet in homes, coffeeshops, or other settings that are conducive to a "face to face and heart to heart" common life in Christ). We are also in the process of birthing new churches from existing churches by creating alternative worship gatherings, new campus sites, and small groups that will become a network of missional communities. Andy Sikora, one of our strategic partners, has developed the Fresh Start Initiative. He is building the framework we are using as we start new churches.

1. We have clear pathways for planting pastors and local churches that want to start traditional forms and simple forms, from coffeeshops to cathedrals. Rich Van Arsdalen from New Philadelphia, Ohio, has started a vibrant traditional church called Mosaic, while Christopher Little has started a united house church network through Devonshire Church in Harrisburg, Pa.

2. We have a clear pathway for planters to be assessed, trained, licensed, and coached. We not only have a one-year training/coaching internship, but are also working on several supervised field residencies with our churches. Our church planting pastors are connected to a cluster, and receive a wide range of coaching that will continue during their first few years of planting.

3. We have a pathway for clusters and churches that want to plant or partner in a new start together. A lot of creative alternatives are emerging as we trust in the Holy Spirit and step out in faith.

Celebrate and pray with us about some things that we have done or are in the process of doing as we start new churches:

- Our web presence has been launched, and we are hoping to do a social media campaign next year.
- Our cluster leaders are beginning to be trained by Andy Sikora in our Fresh Start Initiative.
- We will be starting another church planting cluster and continuing to coach our two newest church plants.
 - We have eight other churches that are in the process of envisioning and strategizing new church planting efforts.
 - We desire to have one new church plant and one revitalized church in every cluster by NC2021. That may seem impossible, but it is amazing what the Holy Spirit can do.



- We are developing the funding and relational coaching to help church planters as they build their prayer, advisory, support teams, and core group leadership/launch teams.

Has our ministry *strategy*, which primarily revolves around leadership, been clearly communicated? Do you and your pastor/church understand how you can accomplish this missional vision (any confusion or resistance)? In what ways do you see this strategy taking hold in the UBIC and your local church?

Moving Forward

Jesus is building his church (Matthew 16:18) and commissions us to make disciples (Matthew 28:16-20). I recently read this quote and it struck me deeply: “If you try to build the church, you will seldom make disciples, but if you make disciples you will always build the church.” Healthy organisms reproduce and fruitful churches multiply. Do you want to grow apprentices of Jesus who are equipped to bless their communities and invest in more apprentices of Jesus? Do you want to be a church that equips and unleashes, or that simply attracts and keeps? What you expect from your leaders and the way you train them will be radically different depending on how you answer those questions. So, do you want to grow bigger in one place, or broader in many places? If you want to be disciple-making community within your neighborhood and among the nations, you will need to build a disciple-making team of equippers.

Between NC2019 and NC2021, I will focus my energy with the cluster leaders toward building leadership teams. The reality of senior pastors and church leaders who operate isolated from one another has got to shift from a *me* to a *we*. We need our pastors and planters to become team-builders who walk with God, equip their leaders to be disciple makers (not just workers), and unleash their people to penetrate culture as they plant churches. This difficult work for our pastors is where my focus in strengthening our cluster leader team is vital. We are developing various support systems for these pastoral teams to effectively disciple those Jesus has brought before them.

My National Conference workshops on “Blueprint for Renewal: Strengthening Your Church” will be the forerunner to our regional cluster/church leader’s prayer retreats. These retreats provide conversations of encouragement and equipping with our pastors, including their church leaders and spouses. Here they will receive an opportunity to build a team together as we facilitate training. It is also a great setting for church leaders to find and foster connection between other UB churches in their region. I kicked this strategy off last year through my cluster prayer retreats on soul care. We cannot effectively strengthen or start churches without this being a central ingredient!

Let’s Pray...About Building Leadership Teams

Cluster Prayer Retreats

To build “Disciple Making” leadership teams requires two profound and challenging shifts. We will discuss what these shifts are and what is involved in accomplishing these in our Cluster Prayer Retreats.

- Pastors need to shift from a *me* to a *we*. Pastors need to be more than preachers, but equippers of disciple makers.

- Boards need to shift from *workers* to *disciplers*. Boards need to be more than managers, but equippers of disciple makers.

These CPR retreats will identify key shifts that need to occur if a leadership team is going to build disciple-making communities. We will discuss two critical tasks that are required for pastors and boards to become united leadership teams who oversee the spiritual maturity, relational integrity, and missional ministry (Acts 20:28, Eph. 4:16).



1. How to build spiritually alive leadership teams—equipping equippers.

The new covenant converts people to become spiritually alive in Christ. We have been encouraging our church leaders to oversee and shepherd the condition of their hearts and others as we all grow closer to Jesus. (James 4:1-4, John 15:1-10, Luke 11:1-4, John 17). This involves two tasks:

1. Watching the condition of our hearts and those we oversee. We will discuss questions and exercises that we can use to evaluate this.
2. Shepherding the hearts of others so that they can mature in Christ. We will discuss initiatives and practices that will help you do this.

2. How to build relationally connected leadership teams—equipping equippers.

The new commandment calls people to become relationally connected to one another. We have been encouraging our church leaders to nurture their relationships as friends (siblings) and cultivate their ministry as mentors (shepherds). (Hebrews 10:24-25, John 15:11-17, Luke 11:1-4, John 17). This involves two tasks:

1. Overseeing our own lives as we assess the relational unity of our people. We will discuss questions and exercises that can be used to evaluate this.
2. Teaching your people to obey by equipping them to love as you care for your flock. We will discuss initiatives and practices that will help you do this.

3. How to build missionally engaged leadership teams—equipping equippers.

The new commission compels people to be missionally engaged in the world. We have been encouraging our church leaders to be witnesses who penetrate their cultures and disciples who plant churches. (Matthew 28:16-20, John 15:18-22, Luke 11:1-4, John 17). This involves two tasks:

1. Assessing your own involvement as well as others to determine if and how you are reaching your community. We will discuss questions and exercises that can be used to evaluate this.
2. Unleashing people to invest and bless the communities where they live, work, and play. We will discuss initiatives and practices that will help you do this.