

# National Ministries

The phrase that succinctly crystalizes my biblical convictions and ministry call is *Never Alone*. Many of us have experienced the liberating power of Christ and the transforming power of his community. But for some of us, ministry has taken quite a toll on our soul. It's difficult to keep our hearts close to God and connected to others.

In the midst of the ongoing pressures, expectations and conflicts of ministry, as well as the hurts, disappointments and losses in relationships, our leaders can feel empty and alone. Discouragement and isolation do horrible things to the soul. When we get disconnected from God and others, the enemy brings a host of deceptive temptations that can lead us down many paths of depression or drivenness. I don't want our pastors or missionaries to rust-out through depression or burn-out through drivenness. This life-together with others and God's people means that we are *never alone*.

We continually need a fresh experience with Christ and his community. This is a daily need and discipline in the Christian life (Hebrews 3:13). The Apostle Paul always wanted to know how the churches and their leadership teams were doing in their hearts and in their relationships (Philippians 2:1-4). His goal was for them to be encouraged in heart and united in love (Colossians 2:1-3). As National Ministries Director, that is my desire as well.

Pastoral ministry is less about the knowledge and skills required to build a "successful ministry" and more about the wisdom and maturity needed to love God and others well. We need leaders who prayerfully pursue God and courageously care for others at the level of the heart. My metric for success is less about efficiency and productivity and more about spirituality and community. I began my ministry with the United Brethren in Christ by helping cluster leaders revive their hearts to prayerfully walk with God. I'm encouraging our leaders to *walk closer with God*, rather than *work harder for God*. My mantra is, "Follow me as I follow Christ."

## Our Churches

### "A Vision for Relationships and a Strategy for Leadership"

Biblically vibrant churches are built on godly relationships and spiritual leadership. The governing assumption of our strategic vision for godly relationships and spiritual leadership is simple: "Fruitful local churches require mature leadership teams."

The Bishop and I have been developing and discussing this vision for relationships in our Cluster Leader Winter Gatherings, Florida summits, regional retreats, and our Neighborhoods and Nations Tour (which included our Global Ministries director, Jeff Bleijerveld). We have structured this 2017 National Conference around evening sessions and Friday workshops that highlight the Three Enduring Commitments and Inspiring Realities that are rooted in our vision.

The relational fruitfulness of our local churches stems from the spiritual health of our leadership teams. Starting and strengthening churches that are spiritually alive in Christ, relationally connected with one another, and missionally engaged in the world will require training and teaming leaders who are devoted to the gospel, unity and mission. We need leaders who can mentor and model biblical maturity. After the National Conference, we will be laser focused on leadership training and team development in our clusters and on equipping church planting pastors in our cohorts.

## Our Clusters

### "Starting and Strengthening Churches by Leadership Training & Team Development"

Our vision for starting and strengthening churches and our strategy for leadership training and team development are rooted in our cluster system. Healthy and high-functioning clusters are core to accomplishing our vision for relationships and our strategy for leadership. Our pastors gather together as cluster groups to help one another grow spiritually, relationally, and missionally.

With our cluster leaders, the Bishop and I have been helping many churches in crisis and pastors in



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transition. We team with them for assessments and strategic planning, training and coaching, licensing, and stationing. We can't do it without them! We are here to encourage, train, and support our staff (cluster leaders) in each region.

**“Every pastor matters – every church matters: Bigger ≠ Better”**

## The Cohorts

### **“Building Disciple-Making Communities by Equipping Church Planting Pastors”**

To build disciple-making communities that are spiritually alive in Christ, relationally connected to one another, and missionally engaged in the world will require a targeted strategy for equipping church planting pastors. We cultivate the wisdom, maturity, and skill of our church planting pastors in cohorts with other church planting pastors.

We have designed an accredited practicum experience that serves as a Supervised Field Internship. The SFI is uniquely customized for leaders who want to plant and pastor churches. It focuses on cultivating biblical foundations, spiritual disciplines, and ministry competencies needed to build disciple-making communities within our neighborhoods and among the nations.

We work closely with Huntington University to place PRIME student interns into United Brethren churches (a great pipeline for future church leaders). We are partnering with Evangelical Seminary in recruiting, training, and mentoring our church planting pastors.

Every church planting pastor will be part of a sending church, involved in a regional cluster, connected to a church planting cohort, and personally coached through a three-stage process for starting and strengthening churches. We currently have six couples being evaluated and connected into churches, clusters, cohorts, and coaches. Our aim is to take at least ten church planting pastors, couples, or teams through the supervised field internship every year.

## The Cohort Process

1. *Application, Assessment, Acceptance.* This is a very personal and relational process of collaboration between the National Ministries Director and cluster leaders.

2. *Haven for the Heart Retreat.* Orienting church planting pastor, spouse, and/or team to the Supervised Field Internship.

3. *Seminar Workshops.* Developing the biblical foundations, spiritual disciplines, and ministry competencies for disciple making communities.

4. *Celebration and Commission.* A time of worship, prayer, and sharing among church planting pastors, their teams, sending churches, clusters, cohort companions, friends, and families.

## Sharing the Journey

I've logged many hours on conference calls and road trips with our Interim Bishop. By reading his report, you will get a taste of the variety of meetings we've had with churches and pastors. My wife, Pam, and I have hosted several Haven for the Heart retreats with pastors, missionaries, and ministry teams along with their spouses. Rather than give you a list of everyone I have seen and everything I have done, I decided to share a specific scenario that gives you a picture of the journey I've been on and what it looks like as I/we start and strengthen churches.

I met Chris Little at a winter gathering for cluster leaders. He asked if he and his wife, Keri, could meet with Pam and I for a Haven for the Heart retreat. Like many of our pastors and wives, they felt discouraged, confused, and alone. With a safe setting to share their hearts and discuss the challenges they were facing in their church, they were beginning to feel recharged to step back into their ministry roles.

As our first action step, Pastor Chris and I met with his pastoral staff and governance team individually, including their spouses. We assessed their personal challenges as leaders and their collective desires as a team. We developed a strategic plan to help them move ahead as healthier leaders and a more unified team.

After Chris unexpectedly and tragically passed away (which was a huge loss for his family, church, and our denomination), we met with his family and leadership team to coach them through a pathway forward. This included stationing Ray Seilhamer as an interim pastor to bring stability and healing, and help prepare

this church for their next pastor. Beyond strengthening Mt. Pleasant, we envisioned what church planting could look like, which was one of Chris's long-term goals.

As we waited on God, Christopher Little V and his wife, Liz, called me to express their desire to plant a church in the Harrisburg area. Through several months of assessment interviews and conversations, we decided he had the call, the character, the place, and the plan to begin a Supervised Field Internship. Christopher and Liz will join the Devonshire staff while we help them prepare to start a new church. He is a part of a sending church, is involved in a cluster, will be in a cohort of church planting pastors, and will get personalized coaching.

## Haven for the Heart: Retreats

These retreats are for UB pastors and their leadership teams who are devoted to building disciple-making communities that are transformational, relational, and missional. Church planting pastors, along with their spouses or teams, will experience a process for embracing the New Covenant, the New Commandment, and the New Commission that Jesus taught his disciples to live and pray. These dynamics are rooted in the enduring commitments and the inspiring realities of our UBC. These retreats will help you embrace the vision and experience the process.

### Embracing the Vision

United Brethren churches are devoted to the *Gospel* of being spiritually alive in Christ, to the *Unity* of being relationally connected to one-another, and to the *Mission* of being missionally engaged in the world. Therefore, we are growing leaders who embody our vision by walking with God through The Lord's Prayer—seeking after God with a heart of contentment, loving people with a heart of forgiveness, and battling temptations of the evil one with a heart of faith. Our prayer packet and podcast presentations can be downloaded at [www.havenfortheheart.com](http://www.havenfortheheart.com). From there, go to the blog where you will find the Lord's Prayer podcast.

### Experiencing the Process

Starting and strengthening churches within our neighborhoods and among the nations will require leadership skills needed to ask the right kinds of questions, which assess the right kinds of issues, and which ultimately address the right kinds of outcomes. Our churches, clusters, and cohorts are coached through a three-stage process of leadership training and team development. We have prepared podcast interviews about this process.

## Tools for Helping Churches

The following are tools I use as National Ministries Director to help churches, clusters, and cohorts personally reflect on the spiritual, relational, and missional values of our vision. It provides a framework that helps us ask the questions that are needed when dealing with the issues that come with strengthening existing churches and starting new ones.

1. *Assessing/evaluating our outcomes.* How are you overseeing the condition of your hearts, relationships, and ministries as well as those in your flock/family?

a. *Questions of observation.* What do we see, feel, and hear regarding this enduring commitment and inspiring reality?

b. *Questions of imagination.* What would you see, feel, and hear if the Holy Spirit was helping you to embrace and experience this reality?

c. Listening to people's stories conveys more than statistics.

2. *Addressing/cultivating our initiatives.* How are you shepherding your flock/family as examples who model biblical spirituality and as equippers who mentor biblical maturity?

a. *Questions on believing.* What would we need to believe for this enduring commitment to become an inspiring reality?

b. *Questions of behaving.* What must we do that is practical and yet can only happen with the supernatural power of prayer?

c. Engaging people to dream and envision how to use their giftings in obedience to Christ.