

Come Together Around the Table

Face to Face and Heart to Heart with God and Each Other

Vision and Values

“Come Together Around the Table” as we strengthen churches that are spiritually alive in Christ, relationally connected to one another, and missionally engaged in the world. Likewise, let’s start disciple-making communities within our neighborhoods and among the nations that are also rooted in Jesus’ vision and values which the UBIC has rested on for over 250 years!

This ongoing process of renewing toward reproducing is all about relationship with God, with one another, and with others in our world. From numerous coffee cup conversations to table-talk trainings, we’ve witnessed the wind of the Holy Spirit blow three ways that align with us being Alive, Connected, and Engaged:

1. The Holy Spirit is helping our pastors and people to walk with God more than work for God. It’s becoming less about duty and more about desire. “Let the wind blow within us!”
2. The Holy Spirit is helping our pastors move from me to we, and our people from commitment in programs to devotion with people. “Let the wind blow between us.”
3. The Holy Spirit is helping our pastors to plant disciple-making churches, while our people penetrate their cultures wherever they live, work, or play. “Let the wind blow beyond us.”

The issues we address and the questions we ask as we “Come together around the table” evolve from the three kingdom practices of John 15, along with the three petitions of the lifestyle prayer Jesus taught his disciples. Therefore, everything we pursue in each other and pray about with one another revolve around the three realities that govern our biblically-based, historically-rooted vision and values:

1. Experiencing the beauty of wholeness through the practice and petition of abiding in Christ: How are we growing closer to God and helping others to do the same?
2. Experiencing the intimacy of belonging through the practice and petition of loving one another: How are we building stronger relationships and helping others to do the same?
3. Experiencing the adventure of meaning through the practice and petition of fighting the evil temptations that deaden our hearts, destroy our relationships, and derail us from the message and ministry of reconciliation: How are we showing and sharing the healing presence of Jesus and helping others to do the same?

All this is helping us transform our mindsets and metrics from how many to how well. Our pastors are evaluated and encouraged to be faithful (responsible to what’s in their control) more than being successful (results that are out of their control).

The fruitfulness of our churches is rooted in the vision and values of our relationships and leadership. As we cultivate prayerful communities of one-anothering friends, alongside shepherding-servant mentors, our authentic faith and genuine love rings out to those where we live, work, and play. This supernaturally simple



Mike Dittman
*Director of
National
Ministries*

disciple-making process is what anyone can do anywhere. Therefore, everyone needs to be equipped to do this everywhere. We are learning to grow churches broader more than bigger; being church in the sanctuaries and on the streets; or more accurately, being his spiritual sanctuaries in the midst of our sacred spaces!

The Pathways with the Process

The disciple-making relational process of “pursuing and praying,” which I shared at our last national conference, is what we model and mentor in the midst of our organizational structure and strategies. Let me briefly explain the difference and alignment of our relational process in the midst of our organizational pathway.

The UBIC has a consistent organizational structure with clear ministry strategies. This provides settings for connection and coaching, such as national conference, pastor-spouse summits, Cluster Leader Winter Gatherings, as well as services for encouragement and equipping, like Haven for the Heart Retreats, Assessment Pathway Visits, Disciple-Making Cohorts, etc.

Every growing organism needs to be organized, but the pathway is not the process. If this is not understood, then all organizational structures and strategies become mechanistic systems without authentic love and genuine involvement for others. We are taking people on a journey with us and others, not simply plugging them into programs.

Take the example of an assimilation pathway in most local churches. It’s designed to help new people get connected and hopefully discipled (from initial greeters and signage, to follow-up emails and conversations, to finally getting them into a group or a place to serve). This pathway that moves from lighthearted chitchat (2-3 minutes) to meaningful connection (2-3 hours) can be done mechanistically and/or relationally. We don’t want organizational structures and strategies that are simply governed by pseudo-community and perceived care (going through the motions just to get that task done, so that people are plugged into a program), but a pathway with clear touch points that are governed by prayerful people who genuinely love and relate well. The challenge is often that it takes time to really listen to people and care about them. It also takes a lot of humility, vulnerability, and courage.

Those with whom I’ve had coffee cup conversations or have watched me in a stationing-renewal process have noticed a way of listening that happens on three levels. It’s a way of listening to a person’s outside story, while drawing out what God is saying in their inside story, to discerning what it means to stay in step with the Spirit as we all learn to walk in the larger story.

1. Pursuing the realities of the outside story.
2. Pondering the realities of the inside story.
3. Praying about these realities in light of the larger story.

We are in the process of identifying those who long for real renewal and deeper connection in their own lives, churches, and clusters. At this national conference you’re invited to hear about this relational disciple-making process at our workshops, discuss this with us during our free times, and experience this with us during our morning prayer gatherings. Our two-year plan is to invest in those who desire to do this with others (2 Timothy 2:2).

Strengthening Toward Starting

Our pathway toward strengthening churches that start new churches is governed by a process of spiritual and relational renewal. Renewing hearts is always central to reproducing disciples!

“Come together around the table” is a two-year initiative from NC2023-NC2025. This year we are strategically identifying hungry, humble pastors and church leaders, inviting them to discern their desire, and investing in 32 who are devoted to do the same alongside us the following year. Each person we identify, invite, and invest in will identify, invite, and invest in one other, who will identify, invite, and invest in another (2 Timothy 2:2).

Rather than simply list everything I’ve been doing, let me tell you one key story that is a microcosm of so many. Rick Tawney is one of our pastors, church planters, cluster leaders, and strategic partners. Several years ago, I identified Rick as a humble, faithful guy with a huge heart for God and others. I invited him into my heart and home to discern his call and desire. Then I invested in him for several years (much like what I have done with Matt McConnell, Jeremiah Ketchum, Josh McKeown, Greg Voight, and several others).

Rick began to pastor one of our dying churches in the heart of Columbus, as he started a simple church network. We did an assessment pathway visit to discern what God was up to, a cluster training retreat to get other pastors alongside him. Here is how Rick Tawney describes the church.

The Hilltop Hub represents a pioneering initiative, uniting two UB churches (Renew Communities Cbus & First UB of Columbus) to serve the local community and foster the growth of disciples in both congregations. Inspired by Luke 4:18-19, our mission is to proclaim the gospel in every corner of society, touching every individual and transforming lives. The Hilltop Hub is a dynamic and vibrant space where individuals and organizations come together to address the diverse needs of our neighborhood.

Located in the heart of the Hilltop area (Columbus, Ohio), the Hub serves as a central gathering point for various programs and services aimed at supporting the physical, emotional, mental, and spiritual well-being of our community members. It acts as a beacon of hope, providing a safe and inclusive environment where people can find solace, connect with others, and access the resources they need.

What sets the Hilltop Hub apart is its commitment to collaboration and partnership. By working closely with five different organizations, the Hub maximizes its impact and extends its reach into every corner of our community. Together, they offer a range of transformative programs, from recovery support groups to trauma-sensitive church gatherings, catering to the unique needs and challenges faced by individuals who have experienced hardship and adversity.

The Hilltop Hub is not just a physical space; it is a symbol of unity, compassion, and renewal. It represents a shared vision of bringing about positive change and transforming lives within our community. We invite you to join us in supporting this inspiring initiative.

Andy Sikora, my associate director of Church Planting, has been overseeing what we call our Fresh Start Initiative. Here is what he has to say.

The Fresh Start Initiative is focused on starting new churches in new places to reach new people with the hope only found in Jesus. Since our last national conference, we have had the opportunity to work with two planters starting new United Brethren churches in two new places. In the spring of 2022, Dan Reed launched Harvest Mill Church in Brookville, Pa., and Nate Sams launched Known Church in Surprise, Ariz. Both churches have established a missional presence in their community, connecting to people who don't know Jesus yet through engagement in their schools and neighborhoods.

One of the primary ways the UBIC will be able to send more church planters is to adopt a multiplication mindset in our current churches and leaders. Since 2020, we have journeyed with 28 pastors through Exponential's Multipliers Learning Community that helps churches identify which level their church is currently in (Declining, Plateau, Addition, Reproducing, Multiplying) and what changes in disciple-making, mission, and scalability they can make to equip and send more people into their communities to live on mission. We believe a natural by-product of experiences like this will be a raising up of new leaders who might sense a call to start a new church in a new place.

We are very excited about what is next for church planting in the UBIC. We have established a new partnership with the New Thing Network and believe all churches (established and new) will benefit from their Movement System and accompanying trainings around disciple-making, leadership development, and church multiplication plans that can boost movement in every church (check out the workshop with Mike Wiggins from New Thing). We are also very excited to be in conversation with three potential church planters who could plant new churches in the next two years. We're also working to establish church planting networks throughout several states to invite willing churches to partner together to start new churches in new areas to reach new people with the hope of Jesus.

Pray for new church planters.

Pray for youth and young adults to be called at an early age to pastoral ministry and church planting.

Pray for willing churches who will send and support planters and new churches.

Pray for conversion growth in new churches.

Pray for people to catch a vision of everyday missionaries sent to make disciples throughout our communities.

Please give thanks to God and continue to pray as he unfolds his plan and empowers his people.