
Chapter Three

“City Church:” Biblical? Achievable?

“Where do you get this idea that all of the churches across our community are to join some kind of ‘city church?’” Whether I get this push back directly and verbally, or by overt non-participation, there are a lot of pastors and leaders of non-profits in our cities just not buying into this message and movement. I’ve already laid out a Prologue and two Chapters celebrating what I see as a timely work of God’s Spirit to bring on-line concrete answers to Jesus’ prayer for unity among his followers. But let’s get real, there’s resistance to this.

Is a citywide expression of Jesus’ Body a biblical pattern?

If so, what would it functionally look like in the context of a community comprised of a variety of churches, non-profit Christian organizations and a host of ethnic and Christian economic sub-cultures? Patch in the presence of Catholic churches, mainline Protestant Churches (“liberal” as distinct from “evangelical”), and Orthodox congregations, and the question gets even more complex. Historically, Catholic dogma holds that they are the only “true” church, tracing unbroken succession from the Apostle Peter. That’s a big

deal. The Orthodox streams stake a similar claim. Then enter the Protestant Reformation, with its four hundred years of exponential ecclesiastical fragmentation that has resulted in virtually tens of thousands of denominations. Protestants tend to stake claims to the legitimacy and autonomy of *their* denomination or congregation. But let's recognize also that there has been an increase of "para-church" endeavors pursuing their passion/mission through ministries parallel to the "church."

So, what does "one church, many congregations" realistically look like in a community? This is a fair question that calls for some compelling answers. We need to gain a realistic understanding of how a healthy, functional local church body participates in the wider Body. This is neither conformity, nor uniformity. But, as these citywide expressions are emerging across the world at present, this is the beauty of a unity found in diversity, and grown through maturity of character and an irenic spirit.

Generally, we can say the "Church" takes three expressions in our world. **1) The Church universal**, all who have genuinely received God's grace gift of forgiveness and life in Jesus, and are sealed by the Holy Spirit, regardless of any formal church affiliation, Catholic, Orthodox or Protestant. The Father knows those who are truly his. **2) The Church local**, individual congregations or house fellowships where there is a clear appointing of spiritual leadership that teaches, disciples, admonishes and disciplines its members. **3) The "city church,"** a wider, inclusive expression of the Body of Christ in a city or region. Now, I doubt anyone would

argue against the first two expressions above. But there are significant and legitimate questions about the legitimacy of calling the citywide expression of collective believers a “church.” If you will stay with me on this, you will find that I prefer to call this expression a “kingdom community.” No, such a citywide expression does not appoint elders. It does not have authority to discipline its members. It cannot and should not ask for a tithe from its participants. The local congregation is clearly God’s vehicle for winning, growing and disciplining followers of Jesus.

So, what am I really talking about here? I am talking about a diversity of born-again living stones from a variety of congregations identifying as a wider community committed to advancing God’s kingdom, convinced that at some level, and in some endeavors, we are “better together.” In light of my content in Chapter 1, to coin the title of a pop song from the 1970’s, “We are Family.” This is about a Father wanting to be with all of his kids, and wanting his kids to get along. This is about a Southern Baptist coming to appreciate and pray with an Assembly of God, an Hispanic worshipping alongside an African-American, a millennial and a boomer working together to mentor at-risk kids. *Whatever congregation or affiliation you identify with, can we not all embrace the call “to reach the whole city with the whole gospel through the whole church?” The common, cohesive mission of the “city church” is to work cooperatively and collaboratively to win and disciple the collective souls of a city.* I believe deeply we can steward a sustainable culture committed to praying, caring for the needy and sharing the gospel with the lost. Jesus, our Chief Shepherd, calls all of us in any given community to serve

as “under-shepherds,” working towards the same goal of serving the least and saving the lost.

One of my favorite author is Philip Yancey. I love this brother's honesty, and superb word-crafting. I want to quote him at length here, as his words so powerfully confirm my point:

Diversity complicates rather than simplifies life. Perhaps for this reason we tend to surround ourselves with people of similar age, economic class, and opinion. Church offers a place where infants and grandparents, unemployed and executives, immigrants and blue bloods can come together. Just yesterday I sat sandwiched between an elderly man hooked up to a puffing oxygen tank and a breast feeding baby who grunted loudly and contentedly throughout the sermon. Where else can we go to find that mixture? In his great prayer in John 17, Jesus stressed one request above all others: “that they may be one.” The existence of 38,000 denominations worldwide demonstrates how poorly we have fulfilled Jesus' request. I wonder how different the church would look to a watching world, not to mention how different history would look, if Christians were more deeply marked by love and unity.” *Christianity Today*, Nov. 2008

So, do *you* wonder what the church might look like to the watching world in *your* community if there was a citywide expression of authentic John 17 community emerging and growing in your midst?

The Biblical Data

On the Mount of Olives, we see a rare, transparent look into Jesus' heart as he weeps over the city of Jerusalem, and its inhabitants. He had come first to his own people. He was soon to suffer and die as their Messiah. In light of our theme from Chapter 1, notice the familial language, “I have longed to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings” (Lu. 13:34). This is a clear, consistent offer from the heart of the Father for nearness and nurture. But Jesus weeps, agonized by the response, “you were not willing” (Lu. 13:34). Clearly, the collective souls of Jerusalem carried a corporate identity and responsibility in their response to revelatory truth, and an offer of personal relationship to their Redeemer.

We see a further expression of Jesus' agony over the collective souls of a city recorded in Revelation, but this time with hope. But what is clear and compelling to me is this virtual “last word” of the New Testament canon, the personal words to real people in real cities brought through John the Apostle. I realize there are a variety of ways to interpret the letters to the seven churches Jesus dictates to John. But what is unmistakable to me is that Jesus brings a city-specific, contextual commendation and critique to his people dwelling in each of these seven cities. Of course in Ephesus, Smyrna and Philadelphia there were house churches all over town, “ekklesias” (called out ones), churches, congregations. But *Jesus clearly addresses the collective souls of the redeemed, the totality of saints living in that place, with a message tailored to its unique context and culture.*

It has become evident to me that in the First Century, the Lord dealt with his people on two levels, through “house churches,” individual congregations with elder leadership, pastors and teachers, and also on this city level I am describing. The Book of Acts is replete with both. “Then *the church* throughout Judea, Galilee and Samaria enjoyed a time of peace. *It* was strengthened and encouraged by the Holy Spirit” (Acts 9:31, emphases mine). How can anyone get around the reality that herein is a description of the “regional,” collective expression of Christ’s Body, and that there is a distinctive, geographical work of the Spirit in that region? And this corporate, cohesive “family” experienced the common awe of God’s attributes and character. They also witnessed a clear supernatural growth of the overall Body of Christ, which occurred in specific local assemblies. So, of course there were numerous individual congregations in that region. That’s a given. So, it is appropriate to talk not “one or the other” but rather “both/and.” And beginning with “the church” in Antioch, where the disciples were first called “Christians” (11:26), a new city-reaching strategy was birthed by the Holy Spirit, described in Acts 13:1-3. While “the church at Antioch” was worshiping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit set Barnabas and Saul apart for a new work, and sent them out. Where? To specific cities, one after another.

It is not a surprise, then, to see how Paul addresses his letter to the Romans: “To all in Rome who are loved by God and called to be saints” (1:7). Likewise to Corinth, “To the church of God in Corinth, to those sanctified in Christ Jesus and called to be holy, together with all those everywhere

who call on the name of the Lord Jesus Christ” (1:2). So, here it is, both the “city church” gathered at Corinth, and reference to the “church universal,” in Paul’s words, “all those everywhere.” And we see the same “city church” address in Ephesians 1:1, Philippians 1:1, and Colossians 1:2. Look also at Paul’s charge to Timothy: “The reason I left you in Crete was that you might straighten out what was left unfinished and *appoint elders in every town...*” (Tit. 1:5, emphasis mine).

So, we may ask, was this “city church” expression unique only to the emerging, first century church, an expression that preceded an increased organization of “local church” congregations? Did the “city church” have its day, to be super-ceded by a plethora of autonomous congregations, and endless denominations? While some may argue so, I personally think not. I come down squarely affirming the reality of all three expressions, the church universal, the church local and the church across a city or region. *I believe we are returning to a correct understanding and functioning of Jesus’ Body on earth. I am convinced we are in a day when the Holy Spirit is initiating and igniting a restoration of the identity and responsibility of the Body of Christ in geographically specific communities to collaborate on the completion of Jesus’ Great Commission to win and disciple all peoples.*

A Holy Temple Rising

I want now to turn to Apostles Paul and Peter to give us more light on what this “city church” expression might look like. In the New Covenant context, *the nexus of relationship is neither tent, tabernacle or the splendor of a temple. The nexus is the inner, spiritual chamber of any heart that makes a place*

for the presence of deity to dwell. When any person hears the gospel and receives its benefit, he or she is “marked with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit, who is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance” (Eph. 1:13, 14). Writing to the believers in Corinth, Paul posed this profound question: “Don't you know that you yourselves are God's temple and that God's Spirit lives in you?” (1 Cor. 3:16). This is true of any individual who receives the gift of forgiveness in Christ. Likewise, it is true of the larger corporate Body of believers: “For we are the temple of the living God. As God has said: ‘I will live with them and walk among them, and I will be their God, and they will be my people’” (2 Cor. 6:16). Paul is referencing the original revelation of God's heart from Leviticus 26 (Chapter 1). From Old Testament to New, there is constancy and constancy of his desire and design.

This amazing design, which frankly exceeds comprehension, is more vividly captured in the Hebraic language employed by both Paul and Peter. Having established God's purpose of removing the wall of separation/distinction between Jews and Gentiles, and creating “one new man,” all believers now have one common “access” to God the Father (the “church universal,” Eph. 2:14-18). As if this new reality is not profound enough, Paul goes on to describe the Body of Christ as “members of God's household,” built on the truth and teachings of the apostles and prophets, with Jesus the “chief cornerstone.” When we talk about a “city church” expression, it is imperative that any such movement in a city be built on the rock of revelatory truth given us through God's chosen apostles and prophets. So, what does a non-negotiable “cornerstone” of doctrinal truth look like?

I believe we must find unwavering agreement on at least three core points of orthodox doctrinal truth: 1) the triune nature of the Godhead, as revealed in Scripture, 2) Jesus Christ is Son of God and Son of Man, who alone offers the gift of salvation by grace, received through faith, and 3) the Scriptures are the Word of God that guides our lives. This immediately leaves out of a bona fide expression of “city church” any and all who “waffle” on these three touchstones. Thus, so-called “liberal” churches and cults will self-select out of any association that is anchored in the absolutes of a truly biblically based gospel.

Now, here's the high point of all architectural blueprints ever dreamed or designed in the history of humankind:

“In him (Christ) the whole building is joined together and rises to become a holy temple in the Lord. And in him you too are being built together to become a dwelling place in which God lives by his Spirit” (Eph. 2:21,22).

Only the love and grace of Jesus can join together men and women, young and old, of diverse culture, color, and language into a singular spiritual society! And this holy endeavor is not static, but fluid. The word “rises” (present indicative tense) depicts an on-going process, literally, “is rising...and will continue to rise.” The phrase “are being built” is likewise present indicative, literally “is growing.” This living Body of Christ, present on earth, localized in language groups, cultures and communities, is “being built.” And the ultimate goal is to become a “dwelling place” for our triune God. And

Paul is clear: this can only happen by the supernatural grace of the Holy Spirit selecting and putting each living stone in its place. Any localized expression of this living temple is thus a “work in progress,” with living stones being added and cemented in, until the close of human history.

Let's be honest. This is Holy Scripture, the Word of God. But in view of the reality of any given real place in the real world, this language can sound hyper-spiritual. Where do we find any semblance of this in space/time reality? *With so much disagreement and incongruence over theology and ecclesiology, and so many members of Christ's Body relationally at odds, is Paul describing the same world you and I live in?*

Remember, we're not talking utopia here. We're talking about an achievable, “work-in-progress” foreshadowing a future, hoped-for reality. We're talking about the annual “Kingdom Come” gathering of saints in the sports arena in Kingston, Ontario, with the venue booked through 2015, and a vision to increase participation each year. We're talking about fourteen venues for the annual Global Day of Prayer in the Greater Toronto Area, each gathering distinguished by ethnic or linguistic expression, but all open to the wider Body of Christ. We're talking about Love and Care Ministries in Abilene, Texas, a citywide endeavor to meet the needs of the poor and marginalized. We're talking about the historic emergence of a greater Kansas City kingdom coalition, “Elevate K.C.,” with an initial missional focus: “helping every urban elementary child read at grade level and, and expanding and serving youth summer learning programs.” This endeavor is comprised of thirty five to forty leaders of

major ministry networks and marketplace initiatives. Visible, viable snapshots of a “holy temple rising” in real places. No, this is not a hyper-spiritual fantasy, but achievable when Jesus’ followers in any place embrace the benefits of his John 17 priestly prayer:

Peter, a Jew familiar with Old Covenant language and imagery, brings added light to Paul’s revelation of God’s “desire and design to dwell.” In 1 Peter, chapter 2, he begins with a straight-up exhortation to his readers to get rid of all the salacious, insidious attitudes that cause suspicion and separation among fellow believers. Then, depicting Jesus as “the living Stone—rejected by men but chosen by God” (1 Pe. 2:4), he says of his readers—

“...you also, like living stones, are being built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ” (1 Pe. 2:5)

Literally, the meaning here is “lively stones.” The connotation is sprightly, spontaneous, vibrant! The makings of this “house” are living, organic materials! Now, Old Covenant Jews prided themselves on the beauty and majesty of their Temple. But the New Covenant, and with it a new dispensation of grace, offers a living temple of incomparable beauty, a unity of life comprised of a diversity of living, vibrant building blocks.

So, in any given place, this could look like a squarish Southern Baptist stone, with a roundish, asymmetrical Pentecostal stone overhead. And to the left, a born-again Episcopalian

stone, with purple, liturgical hue, and to the right, a perfect spot and fit for a born-again black Nigerian tribal chief. And what holds such diversity together? What minimizes friction between the stones? The soft, pliable cement, the agape love of Jesus, the God-given capacity to honor and prefer others above ourselves. Clearly, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, the two Apostles are here offering Old Covenant Jews consolation over the soon-to-come loss of their Temple, and inspiration to Gentile believers, who never even set foot in the Jewish structure, but now have embraced the mystery and marvel of being the very locus of God's presence!

And all stones, corporately, comprise a "holy (royal) priesthood." Every believer is a priest, with the privilege of honoring and serving the one High Priest. And the "spiritual sacrifices" offered are those of the heart: adoration, praise, honor, and service to the Redeemer, who already offered the once-for-all sacrifice for all humankind. So, *the people of God, restored in his image, bear both the sanctity of priests, and the dignity of kings.* And, for a twofold purpose: 1) to "declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness, and 2) to "live good lives among the pagans," so that even if they scorn you, they will "see your good deeds" and give honor and glory to God. *In short, this living, organic household of faith, cemented together by the love of Christ, in any given city, region or nation, is to engage in proclamation of forgiveness to those still lost, and demonstration of Jesus' compassion to those in need—sharing the good news and demonstrating love through good works.*

In Chapters 4 and 5, I will get “boots-on-the-ground” practical about what this “royal priesthood” might look like in your city. But I need to be clear: Not everyone is going to readily agree with signing on to participate in this “city church.” Here’s some advice. Don’t get annoyed or irritated with those who don’t quickly sign on to this vision, just keep loving and blessing them. The reality is, you need to acknowledge the right of the pastors, elders and deacons of local congregations to differ with you, hold back or self-select out of the mix of the citywide Body. Major on relational/organic submission to the Lordship of Jesus, and minor on organizational structure. Renounce a spirit of promotion, and pronounce on-going invitation to the Spirit to stir and bring others in.

You will find, in time, as the health of Jesus’ Body across the city grows, and the stories of changed lives increase, some of those who have had reservations might start dropping in, one at a time. I have found that some leaders sign on slowly, choosing to participate in small ways. Accept them where they are. Appreciate their contribution. Welcome them into the “family,” and bless them in the spirit of John 17.

Mystery Made Known

I want to elucidate another piece in Ephesians, one of those Pauline nuggets that provokes deep reflection:

“His intent was that now, through the church, the manifold wisdom of God should be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly realms...”
(Eph. 3:10)

The “wisdom of God,” tracing back to Ephesians 2, is the plan to provide his own Son as an atoning sacrifice, to remove the barrier between man and God, and between man and man. Thus, Christ’s blood “destroyed the barrier” between Jew and Gentile, man and woman, rich and poor, powerful and powerless, making “one new man” in Jesus Christ. This wisdom, says Paul, is “manifold.” So, what does *this* mean? Literally, multi-faceted, multi-colored. The plan of the Father to reverse the curses of Satan and sin were laid out from the beginning of creation, as the fall of man came as no surprise to a sovereign God. This implies a panoramic view, inclusive of a variety of aspects and phases (e.g., settling on the plan, selection of the promised seed, prophecies pointing towards the coming hope, the incarnation, atoning sacrifice, resurrection, and the power of the indwelling Holy Spirit to sanctify and empower). The language here describes something multi-dimensional and magnificent, like an ever-changing, awe-inspiring sunset over a lake, ocean or mountain.

And consider this implication from the text. Angels and demons have been watching this “wisdom” unfold over eons of time, intrigued as to how holy God would repair this breach. And here, in Jesus, the promised one, the plan is put in place! And it worked! *And so, when believers, as living stones, honor and prefer one another, walk in love and work together, this is a demonstration in space-time reality that the redemptive plan of God has succeeded. The Body of Jesus Christ works!* For sure Christians are not yet perfect. We are a people in process. But God’s unmerited grace, displayed through the Cross, cements the diversity of saints together

as a witness of supernatural oneness. And when radically different living stones are cemented together in Jesus love, there is a beam of light displayed to the whole creation—human, angelic, demonic—that this wisdom was supreme, and the plan works.

Let me share a living illustration. Siliguri, in North India, is a nexus for a variety of cultures, language groups and religions, in close proximity to Nepal, Bhutan, and Bangladesh. Just being in this place, one is bombarded with the sounds, sights and smells of Hinduism, Buddhism, Islam, and a host of other syncretistic religious expressions. But beginning with a Prayer Summit in 2005, key leaders in the Body of Christ came to a holy resolve: to sow their lives into Jesus’ prayer for unity in John 17:21-23, to pray together every Saturday morning, for one another and for the kingdom of God to increase in their city. They engage in collaborative outreach into other cities in North India, and into neighboring nations, distributing clothing, food and medicines to the needy, and sharing the gospel. I have been privileged to walk alongside three point leaders for this movement, Joshua, Daniel and Enos. In October, 2011, I inquired, “Joshua, bring me up to date on what you’re doing.” Churches had just joined resources to put on an appreciation dinner for the mostly Hindu government officials of Siliguri, a tangible witness of oneness. Appreciating this effort, the Mayor gave Joshua opportunity to preach. *An authentic, tangible demonstration of the love of Christ followers, serving a city, is compellingly attractive.* And, in light of Paul’s word in Ephesians 3:10, this oneness overflows out and up even into heavenly places, like an illuminated billboard or beacon light that advertises an

attractive product. The gospel of love, humility and sacrificial service are the strongest weapons we have to expose and overcome the long-held lies and deceptions of the powers of hell.

So, I just returned from Prayer Summit number nine in Siliguri (June, 2013). Here's a rather astounding update. Numerous times over the years, in my Western, linear thinking, I've tried to encourage these dear brothers to create a formal citywide leadership team, with monthly meetings, goals and assignments. Well, they just didn't do it "my way." Instead, while worshiping the Lord and praying for Siliguri and her peoples every Saturday, the Holy Spirit has faithfully stirred them with vision, consensus to collaboratively advance the gospel. The results of this approach are nothing less than extraordinary! In October, 2012, numerous congregations came together for a three night tent crusade. Typically, gatherings like this demand the presence of security guards. Not one was employed, and not one disturbance occurred. On the final night, around twenty thousand attended, with an estimate of four to five hundred finding Christ. They're doing this again in October, 2013.

Three particular people groups have been historically resistant to the gospel: Biharis, West Bengalis and Muslims. Suddenly, spontaneously, all three are responding to the gospel and are showing up in local churches. One Bihari teen-age girl brought eighty to ninety peers to a Young Life meeting recently. Churches and ministries are now partnering and sharing resources to reach prostitutes and their children in the red light district, and assist in the development of

sustainable livelihood. This past Christmas, the city government approached these brothers, asking them to organize a public presentation in the new downtown commercial center, “In the Name of Christmas,” with Christmas songs, dancing and preaching. And the government paid them ten thousand rupees to cover set-up charges!

So if this isn't exciting enough, here's the “big one!” (the Ephesians 3:10 beam of light into the heavenlies). Every year, most Indian cities host a Puja Festival to honor local and national gods and goddesses. In Siliguri, the Puja Committee had done this for the past ninety-nine years. Well, this past year they compared notes, and determined that the Festival was costing a lot of money, provoked social violence, and “wasn't really doing anyone any good.” So, they disbanded their committee, cancelled Puja altogether, and gave a large stage and props to the Churches to put on a worship celebration!

This, would you not agree, is authentic, biblical “city transformation?” Not by might, human wisdom or well developed organization, but by the leading and creative empowerment of God's Spirit. And not only transformation, but replication, is already underway. These brothers and others have already catalyzed John 17 prayer groups in the neighboring cities of Kurseong and Mirik, and have a bold vision of the sovereign Spirit stirring a movement in the whole region. And when the Lord is on the move like this, be careful to curb human enthusiasm. Don't start running out ahead of Him. Keep discerning his prompts, learning his ways and following his lead. Keep Jesus' words ever in view, “I will build my church...”

Compelling Reasons to Build Unity in a City Context

If a story like this doesn't grab your attention, let me add a few points. You may still be wrestling with this idea of the "city church." Or, if not, you likely know someone who is, and a few more compelling arguments may prove helpful. I'd like to suggest some reasons for kingdom leaders to invest more in building John 17:21-23 unity. Having been involved over three decades helping birth and build the citywide church, in many communities, in many nations, I want to build a case for getting involved in promoting such a covenant community in your city.

So, why invest time, energy and resources in building the "city church?"

- 1. It's biblical.** Unity in diversity is a reflection of the Trinity itself, three separate persons operating with three distinct functions, identifying as one person. Jesus specifically prayed that the relationship between his followers would reflect the nature of his relationship with the Father and the Spirit.
- 2. There is inherent value in collegial relationships.** In Paul's words, we are to be "like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and purpose" (Phil. 2:2). Also, he commends the saints in Thessalonica for the authenticity of their love for one another. In city after city, over twenty years, I have observed kingdom colleagues--mixed gender, multi-generational, ethnically diverse—spending

time together, enjoying one another, laughing and jesting, bearing one another’s burdens, crying and praying for each other. I know men and women, leaders in cities so deeply bonded, they would be willing to die for one another. Isn’t this what Jesus modeled, and commended to his followers? Having friends like this is a rare treasure.

3. **The Body’s witness of oneness has an apologetic power** (“one...that the world will believe,” Jo. 17:23). When we get along, and serve together in the trenches of our cities, our humility, our love for one another, is noticeably attractive. Instead of seeing fragmented, disjointed “body parts,” a community sees firsthand that “Christianity actually works.”

4. **We share the privilege of united intercession for the outpouring of the Spirit with signs, wonders and conversions** (Acts 4:29-31). When saints gather across dividing lines of different theologies and ecclesiologies, to pray for the needs of a city, God gives favor. Paul urges, “first of all,” that the Church prays for government officials, so there can be an environment conducive for the sharing of the gospel (1 Ti. 2:1-6). You can build a culture of intercessory investment, praying into a preferred future for your city, with watchful expectation of return on the investment.

5. It is good wisdom and stewardship to coordinate serving ministries; this is the answer to the proverbial question, “Why re-invent the wheel?” Increasingly, we are seeing models of church and non-profit organizations sharing office space, personnel and resources. Serving ministries can increasingly communicate and coordinate to avoid duplication and competition. Of course there will always be a plethora of different passions and missional endeavors in play in any given venue. But to see ourselves functionally on the same team is wise stewardship, and can only maximize further extension of kingdom influence.

6. To share together a corporate responsibility to win and disciple the collective souls in the city. It is healthy to understand that we are not competing for the same “market share” of souls, but as “under-shepherds” serving the Good Shepherd of all souls, we ask God to prosper one another’s outreach endeavors, and rejoice together when new names are written in the book of life.

7. Maximize training and equipping opportunities (Eph. 4:11). This is a huge benefit for a local Body of Christ. In my city, we offer the Perspectives Course annually, hosted by a local congregation, but available to anyone in the city. Recently, a local church hosted “Jesus in the Koran,” training Christians how to reach out to Muslims, another congregation hosts “Jubilee” annually, a women’s

conference, and invites citywide participation. In the Spring of 2012, a group of Christian Education Directors joined in with the international “4/14” movement (a worldwide stirring of prayer among children), and put a program together on a Saturday. In the Fall of 2012, the Kingston Transformation Network hosted citywide the “Love and Respect” conference, aimed at strengthening marriages and families.

8. Release the synergy of combined gifts and callings,

empowered by the Holy Spirit. Going forward from here, I believe Christ’s Body, across a city or region, is to move towards more of a functional unity, all parts, callings and gifts at work according to the revelation of Ephesians 4:1-16, where the whole Body “builds itself up in love, as each part does its work.” *Is this unity and synergy meant only for one congregation, or organization? No, this is meant for a healthy Body—living stones cemented to other living stones—fitted together in a city or region, every part helping every other part.* As the variety of kingdom assets come into right alignment with one another, we get “synergy.” One plus one no longer equals just two, but three. And three plus three equals nine. Exponential increase of energy, released through the synergy of collaboration.

As you process these points, you may already be “on the same paradigm page” with me, and I’m just preaching to the choir. Or, you may be reflecting on this rationale and

find yourself thinking, “This is a high bar--nowhere close to the reality of how the Body of Christ relates in *my city*.” This may be true, and disappointing. But remember that in any new movement there are always innovators and early adopters. Some courageous pioneer needs to start *somewhere*. Just keep the door of your heart open for new friends to show up, one by one, and keep sharing your vision for the “witness of oneness” of the Body of Christ in your city. And warmly welcome the “fence sitters” and late adopters when they decide to show up and plug in.

Now, I invite you to slip on a hard hat, grab your tool-belt, put on your boots and head with me to the construction site.