



Alliance of Reformed Churches

Local Hub Quick Start Guide

September 2022

What is a Local Hub?

Inter-Church

A Local Hub is a group of roughly **three to nine churches** in the same city or area. You may be the initiator of a mission Hub as an Alliance church, but you will partner with many others beyond our own tribe. This is our ecumenical expression around mission in your local context.

In the first century, the church was struggling to deal with the reality of a vast cultural divide among those who had received the good news about the Kingdom. In fact, a majority of the New Testament letters were written to “the church of the city” which consisted of many local churches (like in Colossae, Rome, Corinth and the cities of Revelation 2-3 like Ephesus, Thyatira, Sardis). These letters aimed to provide a theological foundation, rooted in love, for a unity that reflects the unity IN diversity realized within the Trinity. This is the heart behind Paul’s exhortation in Ephesians 4:2-6, “Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love. Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace. There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to one hope when you were called; one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.” When the church in a city or area begins to increasingly reflect a distinctively Trinitarian love and unity, the world begins to take notice.

Missional

In Eph. 4, Paul goes on to describe men and women who were given to the church as gifts (v.11).

Apostles enable the church to embrace her foundational identity and be sent as the people of God.

Prophets enable the church to be a prophetic witness in the world caring for poor and oppressed.

Evangelists enable the church to proclaim and embody the good news (kingdom) in the world.

Pastors enable the church to become a healing community reflecting the wholeness of the Trinity.

Teachers enable the church to become a people who are immersed in and submitted to the Word.

Ligaments are responsible for movement, strength, and stability within the body. Without them, we would be rendered useless, unable to do anything. Because of them, our body can fulfill its intended purpose. It can grow stronger and accomplish work. Equippers are the ligaments within the body of Christ (Eph. 4:15-16). They enable us to work properly so that we grow up healthy and strong (loving), to maturity (Christlikeness) – restored to our intended purpose. As we are increasingly able to identify experienced, mature equippers within the larger body of Christ, we, together, can increasingly begin to grasp the needs of our city and imagine how we might collaborate, in unity (4:13), to meet those needs as sent servants (4:12) in and through the good news.

Starting a Local Hub

Initial Questions to Ask

- Are any local leaders/churches already gathering to pray for our city/area together?
- Are any local leaders/churches already gathering to imagine how to serve others together?
- Are any local churches already collaborating to serve our city/area together?
- How can we join God in what he is already doing in our city/area? Do we have ears to hear what the Spirit is saying to the churches? (Rev. 2-3, repeated seven times)

Additional Questions to Ask

- What 5-15 local churches seem to have a heart for local missional engagement?
- How can you gather leaders from these initial local churches to pray for the city/area?
- How can you begin developing relationship with as many leaders or equippers as possible?
- Which leaders or equippers will seem most open to relationship and collaboration?

Taking Baby Steps (Ideas)

- Identify which 3-9 churches consistently participate in prayer for the city/area.
- Identify 3-5 key leaders or equippers with whom you can develop a closer relationship.
- Host a meal for the key local leaders or equippers to develop relationship and dream.
- Ask each of these leaders which *other* leaders or equippers should be invited to collaborate.
- Begin to identify a possible core of leadership for the potential local hub.
- Identify a core set of values for hub participants which allows for unity in diversity.
- Begin regular gatherings of core leaders or equippers as a local hub, possibly around food.
- Take care to listen to the stories of each participating church as a hub.
- Take note of each church's heartbeat, values, struggles, and works in the city.
- Create pathways for meaningful relationship, mutual care, and relational support.
- Seek to create a hub culture where humility and vulnerability are valued.
- Plan a day retreat for prayer and further collaboration possibilities.

Growing Up Together (Ideas)

- Ask each hub participant to share the strengths and weaknesses of their church.
- Develop a matrix of the different strengths and weaknesses of each participating church.
- Identify how the strengths complement one another to create a more whole local Hub.
- Identify the areas of weakness or missing strength within the hub.
- Seek to invite other churches into the hub that may complement the participants.
- Seek to identify the mature, experienced equippers within each body.
- Seek to identify the "cracks" (needs) within the city/area that are being missed or ignored.
- Pray and dream together about how you might collaborate to step into the cracks together.
- Identify how each church can utilize its strengths to serve the city/area together.
- Make a plan to begin stepping into the cracks of the city/area together.

The Messy Stuff Babies Make

- Those that can't/won't participate in a hub due to their network/denominational affiliation.
- Those that participate in the hub but aren't committed to its values.
- Those that SAY they are committed to the hub, but are not faithful.
- Hub participants that seek to dominate the gathering.
- Hub participants that extol the virtues of their church's greatness.
- Hub participants that think their church is better because it's *larger*.
- Hub participants that think their church is better because it's *different*.
- Hub participants that view themselves as the doctrinal watchdogs of the hub.
- Hub participants that balk when money and resources come into view.
- Hub participants that view the hub as a means to advance their own agenda.
- Hub participants that inevitably derail every single freakin' gathering.
- Hub participants that hurt each other and scheme against one another.
- Hub participants that bring up divisive subjects consistently.
- Hub participants drain the life out of the other hub participants.

This list could go on and on, but I think you get the general idea. Just realize that it isn't a matter of IF you will face these challenges, but WHEN you will face these kinds of challenges. So, take the time to prayerfully process with your hub core how you'll deal with the "Messy Stuff".

Local Hub Case Study

When most people think of Portland, Oregon, they generally think of the sign that says "Keep Portland Weird" or perhaps the hit show *Portlandia* which is actually weird but fairly accurate and hilarious if you've live there. It's a convergence of beauty, culture, and strange conflicting realities. For example, Portland is known for its lush greenery, gorgeous parks, beautiful roses, constant rainfall, plentiful microbreweries, endless supply of coffee, and local eateries that foodies would die for. But, did you know that there are more homeless individuals AND families in Portland than any other city in the United States? Portland is also known for "equal rights", but immigrants (legal and illegal) can barely make a living and are often denied affordable health and dental care.

Well, for perhaps a decade or so, like-minded local Christian leaders had been gathering to pray for the city of Portland. Over time, there became an increasing awareness, among some participants, of the growing disparity that existed within Portland culture. So, one weekday morning, they gathered at a local coffee shop to dream together about what a gospel centered response might be. It was from this gathering that *Compassion Connect* was born. Each of the represented churches agreed to partner together to meet the needs of those that the city was ignoring – *those in the margins*.

They began by making a list of the strengths and weaknesses of each represented church. From that list, God orchestrated the first *Compassion Connect* health clinic. One church partner had connections to doctors, nurses, and dentists while another was primarily bi-lingual and could act as translators. Yet another church partner had an entire hospitality team ready to cook a hot, delicious meal while another was jam-packed full of evangelists who would pray for each person in need and share the good news about Jesus in a variety of languages.

The churches set a date and location for the health clinic and worked together to spread the word throughout the immigrant communities and homeless networks of South East Portland. As the day grew near, the church continued to gather regularly to pray for God to use them to love and serve whoever would show up at the event. When the day arrived, a line began to form early in the morning. That singular day, **over five hundred people** received a homemade barbeque meal, prayer, and FREE health and dental care in the name of Jesus. In fact, many had to be turned away because there simply were not enough volunteers to meet the demand for care.

One volunteer dentist was so impacted by what he experienced that he ended his lucrative dental practice and opened a FREE dental clinic in the very neighborhood of highest need. And this was just the beginning. The following year there were two *Compassion Connect* health clinics in two different neighborhoods of great need as churches increasingly partnered together. Thousands of the most vulnerable were served and many more were turned away.

After the clinics, each partner church was given the contact information for clinic participants who expressed a desire to know more about Jesus and were charged with the responsibility to connect with them, continue to serve them, and authentically love them in the name of Jesus. One church was so deeply impacted by their experience during the clinic that they opened a FREE oil change and minor auto repair shop to connect with their underserved neighborhood in the name of Jesus.

During year three, *Compassion Connect* became an official non-profit organization whose sole purpose was to aid local churches in partnering together to meet the practical needs of those in their communities in the name of Jesus. Over the course of that year, there were five different *Compassion Connect* health clinics in different areas of Portland with each clinic taking the shape of the participating churches serving those in the margins. And the movement continues to this day.