

Helping Churches Become a Community of Churches

What is meant by “a community of churches”? Suppose a church of 200 people gathers for worship each week. The people experience the true nearness of God in worship. The teaching team delivers messages that biblically based and faithfully applied to the people. There are meaningful small groups, and the members are growing in their walk with Christ. However, one thing is lacking. The people, on the whole, don’t have anyone who truly watches over their souls (Heb. 13:17).

Recognizing this, the leaders begin to train men in the church who possess a shepherd’s calling. Their goal is to provide a shepherd (pastor) for only a limited number of families. After all, how many souls can any one person watch over?¹ These shepherds will care for the heads of each household, and the heads of each household care for their families. If each shepherd oversees only twelve families, and the average size of each family is three, about forty people (including the shepherd’s family) will come under the care of each shepherd. Therefore, the church needs five shepherds to care for the entire flock of 200 people.

These five groups can be called “churches” because each one comes under the care of a shepherd, and together, these churches become a “community of churches” within the larger church. Of course, it’s critical for each church to be in complete unity with each other and to come under the direction of the leadership team. When this happens, there are many benefits for both the leaders and the members of the church.

To begin with, each member of flock has a shepherd—someone who will teach them, lead them in the ways of the Lord, and care for them—all the things a shepherd does. Most importantly, the people will have someone who is genuinely devoted to watching over their souls. This will require, listening, time together, and relationship building. Thankfully though, all these things are possible because each “flock” consists of a reasonable number that each shepherd is able to care for.

Also, the leaders of the church derive great benefit because they are not overwhelmed with the needs of more people than they could possibly care for. Because the churches within the larger church are becoming spiritually healthy, they begin to grow in number. As this happens, the leaders are careful to seek new shepherds who will care for the growing flock of God.

Then, this multiplication of the churches within the church begins to spill over beyond the church. When one of the shepherds is relocated to another city by the company he works for, he is filled with a fresh excitement to plant a new church. Based on what he has learned, he realizes he doesn’t have to purchase land, build a building, establish a budget, initiate programs, etc. Rather, he is able to shepherd others in his own home, just as he did before. Through the natural course of his life, he meets many people (friends, neighbors, coworkers, etc.) who would love to grow spiritually in a dynamic fellowship where God’s word is taught, the people pray, and there is loving support for

¹ See “Helping Shepherds Shepherd the Flock of God” in the Living in the Blessing website, in the box labeled “Church Resources.”

each other. In time, as he is sensitive to God's leadership, he begins a group that meets in the home of one of his neighbors. As the group meets consistently for Bible study and fellowship, he senses within his heart a true shepherd's heart for this flock, and the flock begins to see him and trust him as their shepherd.

In time, they see that every characteristic of church is present in their home meetings, much like what they observe in the pages of the New Testament (e.g., *). Eventually, this group grows to the point that a new shepherd is needed to take some of the members of this flock and to shepherd them in another location. Thankfully, God has already raised up a shepherd from within this group, a person who has learned from his own observation and experience in the group. Then, this pattern continues. The churches multiply until multiple churches are meeting in homes in this community.

Because these churches possess the same basic beliefs and mission, they see themselves as a community of churches. The shepherds of these churches recognize how important it is to maintain their fellowship with each other, so they meet consistently for prayer and fellowship, and they also look for ways they can serve their community for the sake of the gospel.

In time, this community of churches decides to meet together for corporate worship, so they rent space in a local school and invite the community to come. The response is far greater than they anticipated. As these shepherds pray together, some of them feel called to come together to establish for corporate worship on a regular basis. They agree that each should continue to care for their own flocks, but they see the benefits of coming together as community of churches in this community. Because of God's clear blessing, these churches continue to multiply churches within the larger church. In time, they are able to purchase property, build a building, and establish a thriving ministry in their community.

However, some of the shepherds in this community sense God's leadership to continue to meet in their smaller settings, apart from the churches that have banded together. They have seen how God has blessed them and used them to make disciples and multiply churches. Nevertheless, because all the churches sense such a close bond to each other, their leaders continue to gather for prayer and fellowship and to work together to serve their community. They invite the shepherds of all the churches to join with them, and as they do this, they realize they are fulfilling the very thing Jesus prayed for. They are experiencing true unity that causes the people in the community to see that God is doing something truly special among them.

Then, there is still another development. One of the members of these churches goes on a mission trip to another country. The work is very fruitful, with many coming to a saving knowledge of Christ. And because this man has learned so much from his church back home, he explains to the local leaders what God is doing. The people are so inspired, they decide to follow the same pattern. They commit themselves to being sure that all the people in their churches have a shepherd to watch over their souls, and the process of growth and multiplication begins to take place.

There are significant challenges among these churches though because of the deep poverty in that region. Therefore, when the man who went on this trip returns to his home, he shares these needs with his church, and they all agree that they can pray, send financial support, and continue to send people to support them in their work. Now, there is a community of churches that reaches across national borders.

Based on all the above, we see that a “community of churches” can mean many things, including each of the following:

- 1) A group of churches within a larger church.
- 2) Multiple churches that come together to fulfill Jesus’ mission to make disciples in their community (Matt. 28:18-20).
- 3) Churches in various parts of the world that partner together to fulfill Jesus’ mission.

Living in the Blessing Ministries exists to support churches that function as “a community of churches” in all these ways.