

Proposal for Amendment to Geographic Church Family Participation

Prepared by the Elders Service Team

The Elders Service Team recommends, in line with discussions among the Evangelists, Elders and Teachers Teams in Los Angeles in 2011, a formal change in wording to the Cooperation Plan to more accurately reflect the practices we recommend for our family of churches.

ORIGINAL WORDING OF COOPERATION PLAN:

"While each congregation is encouraged to strongly consider becoming part of a regional group in their geographical area, every church leadership has the freedom to decide which one, based on the relationships that will spur them on. Although most churches would consider the benefits of connecting with other leaderships that are in the same proximity to be significant, there may be legitimate or appropriate reasons for a church leadership to join a regional group outside of one's geographic area. At present, there seems to be 29 specific church "families" functioning together for mutual encouragement:

(A chart of either established or potential geographic regions is on the following page. This has been compiled to the very best of our ability based on the most current information that we have in our possession. Please do not look upon this as any more than a reference point. There is no intention here to dictate to what regional group a church must be connected.) "

The Elders Committee, after involvement in more than one case of churches choosing to be participants in geographic families at significant distances from those much closer in proximity, feels the above statement from both the cooperation proposal and the best practices of Geographic families should be reconsidered. Our rationale would include:

- Relational connection (as opposed to geographic) tends to revolve around the church leader's needs and feelings, as opposed to the church membership's best interest.
- While there may be legitimate reasons to function based on relational association, there may be more compelling reasons *not* to do so when all needs are considered. We believe the pros and cons should be discussed with both groups of leaders – the regional and relational -- in order to make the very best decision. This discussion should ideally take place with both groups meeting together.
- Certainly, any situation in which we attempt to build intra- church family may involve conflict and challenge, no matter on what basis it is done. However, it is our observation and experience that more unity problems arise when churches fail to align geographically.
- We appreciate those families of churches and leaders who provided places of safety and refuge during the early days of challenge as we reconfigured our fellowship. However, we also believe the basis for exceptions to geography that may have been legitimate at the time the original Cooperation Plan was written (i.e., when there were sometimes few churches in certain regions with which to unite) are not as vital today.

- When staff hiring takes place across church family lines, those staff making that transition need, as a part of that decision, to commit to be fully engaged in the meetings and activities of their new regional family, and to giving their hearts in building great relationships with the church leaders in the region. This would also hold true for ministry hiring of those just entering the ministry, but trained in a different family of churches.
- While we encourage the building of close relationships within geographic families, we think it is healthy and good for church leaders to cultivate and maintain relationships (including discipling relationships) outside their geographic region.
- We are proposing that any church currently not aligned in the natural GFC* in closest proximity be called upon to commit to a plan to do so. This may require discussion (and perhaps outside help) where significant issues exist. We are also proposing that any GFC receiving a request for membership from churches outside their natural geography inquire as to how they could help to facilitate a plan for the requesting church to move toward participation in their local geographic family.

*GFC = Geographic Family of Churches

SUGGESTED REWORDING:

In order to achieve the vision of a worldwide brotherhood of churches that is united and effective, our expectation is that each cooperating church will identify with the regional geographic family of churches in closest proximity. We encourage full participation in regional meetings, planning, and fellowship, both on a leadership and membership level. Some churches may be in a "border" situation where there is the possibility of more than one regional family to join. In such cases, the local church leadership needs to make a careful and prayerful decision as to which group would be the best choice. That being said, it is our expectation as a cooperating fellowship that each individual congregation be solidly and meaningfully anchored in a regional family of churches that provides spiritual partnership, friendship, encouragement, along with advice, input and mutual accountability.