



Trusting God for a Greater Gospel Harvest in **Philadelphia**

TRUSTING GOD FOR A GREATER GOSPEL HARVEST

Church planting in the Philadelphia area is growing, with several recently organized churches gaining momentum and three mission churches currently underway. Liberti Church Northwest serves Mount Airy, Germantown, and all of Northwest Philadelphia. These neighborhoods have a deep history, having long been racially and economically diverse. Led by Ryan Egli, who previously served in leadership with Liberti East and Liberti Fairmount, this church is one of eight churches in the Philadelphia area that make up the Liberti Church Network.



Top, left to right: Jacob Kim, Evan Curry
Bottom, left to right: Alan Popoli, Ryan Egli,
Barry Noll, Steve Huber

“We worship in a beautiful Reformed Episcopal church building that is over 100 years old. Hudson Taylor would occasionally preach there when he visited the United States, and the church supported his missionary work in China. It’s a weekly reminder that the mission of the church is to make disciples of all nations. The beautiful thing about being

in a diverse neighborhood in Philadelphia is that every day our little church plant has the opportunity to rub shoulders with a wide spectrum of people and belief systems. We have the opportunity to preach the gospel with our words and our deeds to the nations,” said Egli.

Liberti Bucks County is another mission church of the Liberti Network and is led by Philadelphia native Barry Noll. Noll moved back to Philadelphia from Tulsa in 2014 to church plant in the densely populated Philadelphia suburbs, just seven miles north of his hometown. This church serves Warminster, Warrington, and surrounding townships with their Sunday morning service.

“We are intentional about being hospitable to everyone, especially to seekers, strugglers, and skeptics. That is, we want everyone, regardless of wherever they are on their spiritual journey, to feel welcomed, loved, and accepted. Therefore, we aim in all our ministry and worship services to make the good news of Jesus accessible to the 150,000 people who live, work, and play within five miles of our worship facility in Warminster,” said Noll.

Gracepoint North is a third mission church in the metro area, started by Paul

Kim in the fall of 2016. Kim was born in Brooklyn but grew up in Philadelphia. After serving at Gracepoint Church in Erdenheim PA, he was sent with a group of about 50 church members to plant a daughter church in the northern part of the city. Gracepoint North serves the northeastern part of Montgomery County in North Wales.



Liberti Cohort

“We believe that the Church always has the same mission passed down from Jesus Christ and that mission is pretty simple – we strive to build a multiplying gospel community that is faithful to the Great Commandments and the Great Commission,” said Kim.

In addition to these three mission churches already underway, three more church plants are currently in the planning stages with the Liberti Network. Steve Huber, who led in establishing the Liberti Network, explains, “We have three other church planters who are at various stages of the planting process. Alan Popoli

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-Barry Noll, Liberti Bucks County



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~Steve Huber, Liberti Church Network

lives in Kensington and is dreaming about planting a church there someday. Evan Curry is in the earlier stages of gathering people in Northeast Philadelphia, leading a Bible study out of his home that he hopes will develop into Liberti Northeast. In addition, God has blessed church planter Jacob Kim’s efforts to gather people, with more than 60 people meeting, half of them non-Christians.”

PCA church planting in the Philadelphia area, coordinated by Bruce Finn, has been thriving for over 10 years. Although Philadelphia has experienced stronger PCA church planting than many other cities, God has blessed the PCA as a whole with a strong commitment to church planting, sending out one church planter per week, on average, to launch a new mission church in the



Philadelphia Museum of Art

United States and Canada. In proportion to denominational size, few other denominations equal or exceed that number. While that number is strong, it has been at the same level for 20 years.



Left to right: Bruce Finn, Will Stern (planting in Garnet Valley PA), Robbie Schmidtberger (planting in West Chester PA)

Might God open the way for many more church planters to be sent out annually?

During 2016 and 2017, the MNA Antioch Fund for Church Multiplication was established, through the generosity of an anonymous donor, to provide for greater training and mentoring of church planters. This financial support provided for an expansion of work with church planter candidates in the greater Philadelphia area, as well as in many other cities. A primary added dimension is that of intentionally mentoring church planters in a small group cohort setting.

The MNA Antioch Fund provides for church planting churches to increase their staff time devoted to recruiting, training, and mentoring church planters. Several of the Philadelphia churches are now taking more initiative in seeking out potential candidates, rather than waiting for them to discover church planting for themselves. The goal is to see

a significant increase in the number of pastors called to begin new churches in the area, as well as calling more pastors who have grown up in their communities instead of coming in from other regions.

A primary means of this stepped-up recruiting, mentoring, and training is gathering candidates into small groups called cohorts. “Cohorts have born a lot of fruit by creating a space where planters can wrestle with tough questions and real-life situations, share resources, pray for one another, be mentored, and have fellowship with brothers who are also in the trenches,” explains Huber. “It’s all about forming leadership learning communities instead of learning and leading alone. It’s about identifying people who have gifts for ministry and mentoring them into church planting leadership, rather than recruiting church planters exclusively from those already prepared.”



NCC Cohort Candidates, left to right: Tim McCrossen, Andrew Thomas, Jim Oursler, who all work as part of the English language ministry.



Finn explains further, “In ministry, we experience a shortage of ready-made church planters, so we needed to figure out how to develop what you might call a ‘farm system’ like that used in minor league baseball, where we can bring in potential candidates. These candidates may not already be seminary trained, but they are willing to run on a track to see what God might have for them. We find these candidates by exploring the network of rich relationships around us and in our churches.”

Before the cohorts began, Finn coordinated Philadelphia church planter communities of 30 to 50 people gathered frequently in a large group setting to support each other. The support was positive, but a group of that size isn’t able to accomplish the close-knit accountability and community a cohort affords. He explains, “The meeting was just too big to do the kind of small



Left to right: NCC pastoral candidate Andy Zimmerman, Pastor Vinny Tauriello, Pastor Chris Bauer

group mentoring and supporting that cohorts are designed to do. It’s like the difference between a large church Bible study and a small group.”

The MNA Antioch Fund also provided for administrative support to track and plan for existing and new cohorts. Chris Bauer is on the administrative staff with Northeast Community Church (PCA) in Philly. The funding makes it possible for Chris to provide support one day a week for the network of cohorts, keeping track of all cohorts, hosts, and participants in the Philadelphia area.

While all of the cohorts have some degree of ethnic mix, the Bucks County Cohort is one that is unique, made up entirely of pastors and church leaders who primarily serve immigrant and refugee families. Included in this group are Diogo

Inawashiro, Alberto Lima, and Spencer Ewing, who serve in pastoral leadership at Christ the King Presbyterian Church, Philadelphia, a Portuguese and Spanish language mission church whose mother church is Christ the King Presbyterian Church in Cambridge MA. Philadelphia is home to over 50,000 Portuguese language speakers. “Our 85 regular attendees represent six different countries; our Sunday services feature simultaneous Portuguese-to-English translation to serve our many dual language families,” said Ewing, “In the coming year, we are going to expand our evangelism and services to serve the 180,000 Spanish speakers in the area.”



Bucks County Cohort, left to right: Vitaly Kalinovsky (planter at Rock of Israel in NE Philly, reaching Russian immigrants), Alberto Lima and Spencer Ewing (both planters at Christ the King, reaching Portuguese speakers), Robert Carr (Associate Church Planting Coordinator for Ethnic Ministry for Metro Philadelphia Church Planting Partnership), Paul Kim (planter at Gracepoint North in Montgonerville PA, reaching Korean Americans).



NCC ESL Leader Robert Carr

“Our goal is to work intentionally at gathering the next wave of potential church planters into these cohorts, looking forward to many of them being called by God to lead even more new mission churches for a greater harvest in the gospel.”

~Bruce Finn, Church Planting Coordinator for Metro Philadelphia Church Planting Partnership

TRUSTING GOD (CONTINUED)

Ewing concludes, “Everyone in the Bucks County Cohort has a great deal in common in trying to minister among a particular people group. While each group has its own set of challenges, it’s valuable to have a group of people you trust to help navigate those challenges. The cohort also helps increase awareness for our specific missions.”



NCC Pastors, left to right:
Chris Bauer, Maranatha Chung,
Vinny Tauriello, Dennis Blankenbeckler

Vinny Tauriello, who began forming Northeast Community Church nine years ago, leads a total of nine candidates in two cohort groups made up of leaders within his church. Tauriello notes that the men begin by asking what calling God has for them; by the end of the cohort term, they have a growing confidence in how God is leading them into ministry. He explains further, “I think that there’s something about a cohort small-group environment that’s very stimulating. It’s almost like a focus group. It’s not just a group to study the Bible broadly, but a group that asks ‘How does this propel us forward in the mission of God’s kingdom?’”

The Westminster Seminary Church Planting Interest Group started after Finn taught a seminary course on church planting at Westminster and students asked if they could continue the conversation. The group includes some graduates who are currently planting churches and serving in church renewal.



Bruce Finn seated with
Westminster Seminary students

Another cohort meets in South Philly, hosted by Jonathan Olson and Sherwin Kwon, pastors at Grace and Peace Community Church. Darin Pesnell, a church planter in Phoenixville, leads the Metro West Cohort, which includes church planters in West Chester and Garnet Valley. Finn has met with Biblical Seminary President Frank James



Jonathan Olson (left) with
Grace and Peace congregants

and other seminary leaders to encourage their vision for a church planting center, and to create a system feeding seminary students interested in church planting into the cohorts and into the established church plant structure in the area.

The cohort relationship gives lay leaders and seminary students access to veteran church planters, leading to better informed and better equipped lay leaders, and is used by God to call candidates to church planting.



Sandy McCrossen (left) with
NCC ESL Leader Jenn Hogg

“We have done this informally for years, but now with additional funding and staffing we hope to substantially increase the number of church planters we can send out, and to send them out better trained and equipped for ministry,” said Finn. “Our goal is to work intentionally at gathering the next wave of potential church planters into these cohorts, looking forward to many of them being called by God to lead even more new mission churches for a greater harvest in the gospel.”

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- TRUSTING GOD FOR A GREATER GOSPEL HARVEST IN PHILADELPHIA
**HOW COHORTS ARE STRENGTHENING PLANTING
IN THE GREATER METRO AREA**

From the Coordinator

“...Be strengthened by the grace that is in Christ Jesus, and what you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses entrust to faithful men, who will be able to teach others also.” - 2 Timothy 2:1-2



Why did God become man? This age-old question has new resonance for us as Christmas arrives and a New Year begins. God the Son took on human flesh and made his dwelling among us (John 1:14), in order to live and die in our place, exchanging his righteousness for our sins (2 Corinthians 5:21), bearing God’s judgment due us and giving us instead God’s welcome and acceptance (Romans 8:1-4).

Jesus Christ came to work out the saving acts of this gospel for us, to preach it to us, to call us through it to be his disciples, and to empower us to share his good news with those around us, who would in turn believe the good news and share it with others. As Paul challenged Timothy, we entrust the gospel we have received to faithful friends, who teach others also. Christmas truly is meant to be the gift that keeps on giving!

In this issue of *Multiply*, we hear beautiful stories of this gospel rippling effect in greater Philadelphia. All kinds of lines are crossed – language barriers, ethnic barriers, socio-economic barriers – as new churches are formed and the gospel keeps pressing forward. We celebrate these stories, many of which were made possible through MNA Antioch grants, and we long for more. We are praying to see all over the US and Canada church planters raised up and trained, then staying and serving in their local context, even as is beginning to happen in Philadelphia. May the gift of the gospel, in the coming of Jesus at Christmas, continue to be multiplied through his people and his church, in Philadelphia and the world. Amen.

Paul Hahn
MNA Coordinator