

THE PROMISED CLOSING CHAPTERS

These last two chapters were penned three years after writing the prior chapters. The book had alluded prior to the fact that I had not fully completed the writing this book. The hindrance was a lack of shared vocabulary for this discussion. In the interim I was able to travel to discuss this very topic with pastors' groups an additional 130 or more times — separate to weekly gatherings I have with a group of pastors where I live. A broadly shared vocabulary for defining how united Church leadership might work, and something of its purposes and process, resulted. Of note, these definitions avoid key Biblical terms for which different movements and individuals have different definitions. The paradigm articulated has found acceptance from pastors of many denominations, and in pastors' groups across the wider geography of our nation.

However, as various pastors' groups began discussing what they could do together with increased intentionality, this immediately highlighted a new challenge regarding how we manage specific agendas we now accept within our meetings. So, we will consider this topic first.

I hope this will prove useful.

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

Principles for managing agenda in pastors' groups

A pastors' meeting is unavoidably a 'hub' for the united efforts of the Church in each city and town. If certain things aren't considered by the pastors together, where else will they be considered?

With an increase in united efforts taking place amongst churches, a key area of challenge is the juggling of the discussion and management of these things. So how do we manage agendas that we might now agree need to be on the table before us *when there really are multiple valid agendas?*

At one level the answer seems simple, and the question almost redundant. Pastors already manage the operation of their church communities, with their various programmes and activities. Those of us who run businesses, already manage them too. We have managerial experience, so what needs discussing?

The reality is that the managerial dynamics are different to most local churches. Firstly, time is tight because these meetings are not highly regular (maybe 10 times per year), often short (rarely as long as 2 hours), and have the relationship of pastors as a priority (usually including coffee or a meal). It is hard to fit an agenda in. This challenge is then compounded by the reality *that many groups have previously not allowed an agenda into their meetings!* This makes juggling agendas in this specific context an understandable challenge.

However, it remains that many things that sit within the 'unity space' of our cities do not even get a mention in most pastors' groups in an average year. The reasons why we're somewhat weak in our united function is understandable — but changing this is also our responsibility! We need to lift the name of Jesus up in our cities while we can.

To be clear on our context, in many places nationally few have had time to really consider what God's people might be wise to do at the city or national levels, or to take a great deal of responsibility to encourage and support the array of things that might result. To note how we have structured our local churches, pastors are employed by denominations to run congregations — not to bring leadership to the vision or efforts of the Church as a whole in their city or town. So, when pastors give their time to unity things — it's extra work — and I think they are amazing!

However, it remains that many things that sit within the 'unity space' of our cities do not even get a mention in most pastors' groups in an average year. The reasons why we're somewhat weak in our united function is understandable — but changing this is also our responsibility! We need to

lift the name of Jesus up in our cities while we can. We must work while it is light (John 9:4)! There is also something to discuss here because it really is a bit complex. We should expect this to be the case! Encouraging and facilitating the united efforts of the Church in a city or town is, by its very nature, going to be broader and more complex to manage than one individual congregation!

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So, we'll start by looking at how we already do this in our local churches. We'll extrapolate out to the work of a city — and consider a simple framework for what does and doesn't get onto the agenda. We'll then discuss how we manage that agenda — so it doesn't exclude our relationships and prayer, which are foundational dynamics to these groups.

THE ONE HOUR PER WEEK CHALLENGE

I suggest most pastors have only one hour per week available for unity things. Those with a stronger vision for wider city work might have two hours per week available. For example, the monthly pastors' meeting takes two hours — so only 2 hours per month remain (or 6 for those with a greater vision or sense of calling to united things).

A combined church service takes 3 hours. Intentional conversations over coffee with 3 different pastors, to strengthen relationship with them, take 4 hours in total. Someone invites pastors to hear about a possible united project — and that takes 90 minutes. We then each drive back to our local church office and have a full schedule ahead of us. We have very little time available amongst us to consider what exists on the united platform — let alone to manage it well. What is the way forward?

STARTING SMALL

In a local church, only a few things can be included in the weekly Sunday announcements. What gets that profile is hopefully determined on the basis of what is (i) most current, (ii) most important, and (iii) what affects the most people.

This challenge is multiplied many times over in a bigger church. Let's now imagine a church with three to five separate congregations, 150 small groups, and 50 entirely separate ministries. (I previously pastored in a church of over 1000, with 63 small groups, services in 3 languages, and I'd guess about 20 to 30 ministries).

- A youth leaders' meeting might be a current and important matter — but only affects 25 people. A phone call or text message could suffice. They therefore do not get Sunday announcement time.
- An upcoming small group leaders' meeting might involve 200 or more people, and it is important — but this promotional message could likewise be communicated by other means.
- A community ministry special event might be a current matter, and involve a sizable number of people — but in the balance might not be the most important. (We therefore create other habits and platforms on which we encourage these people).

The leadership principles for a larger church are the same for the united Church in a city or town. There is increased complexity — but there are still principles that can guide decisions. The task isn't impossible. This can be effectively managed, and it is important enough to consider.

PRINCIPLES FOR MANAGING AGENDA IN PASTOR' GROUPS

1. THE ONLY ITEMS THAT COME TO A PASTORS' GROUP ARE THOSE REQUIRING OR REPRESENTING UNITY

Chapter 10 was about things that could plausibly be considered the responsibility of the churches together in a city or town. It listed:

1. Stewarding key community opportunities for united representation or engagement
2. Partnership with relevant national initiatives
3. Engagement with the spheres of influence
4. One-off united efforts and local initiatives, as God leads

To consider how we manage the many things that could sit within this scope:

- A city wide programme run by one larger church doesn't need discussion — because it doesn't need unity. However, giving it a little profile, and praying blessing on it might be wise because their programme does represent us all (as in area 1 above) as well as because this affirmation might be important to the relationship we have with the church running the city wide programme.
- A united effort like a proposed united outreach effort in a park (area 4 above), or the establishing of a Pregnancy Choice Centre (area 2 above), might need collaboration between a few churches. These kinds of proposals need space to be aired — so pastors can be aware, to then communicate these things to their interested members. They therefore deserve a space in the time together (even if short), so the vision can be shared and expressions of interest from church leaders given — so those interested can connect and discuss the proposal later.
- People working in spheres of the city in a role that might be representative (area 3 above) could also be on the agenda at certain points — like a campus ministry, or people relating in a representative role for the Church with Council or Iwi. While we might sometimes ignore some of these works because they are structured separately, it remains that they actually represent us. We can affirm them, pray for them, support them and help them. This not only has value; it can be catalytic.

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The point is that giving profile to something affects the perspectives of those listening. This is no different to how local church leadership works. Our comments breathe life into things and enable collaboration. This builds culture, releases resourcing, and brings encouragement.

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Regarding how the various things in the united space could be managed, the outline of Chapter 12 can help. Imagine if the first pastors' meeting of every quarter gave 10 minutes to highlighting things God's people were doing in the city in 2 or 3 spheres of influence. Those areas are then prayed for. This would achieve something valuable in the hearts and minds of the pastors.

We only ever innovate in the areas we have, in some sense, taken responsibility for. This is an important and profound spiritual principle. If I only believe myself to be serving a local church, I will only ever innovate or aid solutions that sit within that scale of operation. If, however, I were to accept that my platform for service were in God's Church in a city (or nation), I would begin to see a different level of problem — thus prompting thoughts of solutions that operate at an entirely different scale! If we do not, as a practice, put the wider vision in front of our pastors, we will see neither the kind of innovation needed, nor the support it needs, coming about to see it achieved!

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One thing we are trying to facilitate here *organisationally* is the connecting of churches and their members to things that might be of interest to them.

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Only when pastors see the needs of the city will they then be able to take that to their

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members, to enable their involvement.

This is about releasing church members to unite as one body, in one Spirit, in their areas of interest and influence, for the faith of the gospel!

2. WE PRAY FOR AND SPEAK ENCOURAGEMENT INTO ALL UNITED EFFORTS AND THEIR INNOVATORS GENEROUSLY

I believe pastors have a role to play in speaking life into areas of ministry that we ‘own’ *together* in the unity space (even if unconnected to our own congregation’s programmes), as well as to pray for them. This is a big statement, and a challenge directed toward all of us involved in facilitating unity, with the glory and mission of Jesus in view.

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The attitude here is one of vision and faith. If we ‘take responsibility’ for the lifting of Jesus’ name in the city, rather than only in our own congregation,

all Christian work in the city becomes something we care about. Words of encouragement then become easy *because we care!*

I also encourage a view that recognises that the various people God has raised up to represent him in city-wide roles *are a part of our team as pastors.*

Even if these people don't attend the pastors' meeting, they are part of 'us.' It is our attitude that is important here.

For example, who gives authority to someone to lead God's Church in its engagement in a University? Who appoints them as our representative? The answer is, God! The authority to appoint Church leaders (vs local church leaders) sits with God alone — as contrasted with the authority I believe we have to prayerfully appoint local church leaders. Our role with regard to Church leadership is only to discern who God might be raising up, so as to then empower and support them if we feel led to.

It is also true that we genuinely need the innovators God raises up — whether in relation to a campus, the facilitation of Bible in Schools, chaplaincy in a hospital, prison or workplace, connecting with Iwi or Council, social services, town planning, or in some other area! Some of these people will have opportunities with greater potential for spiritual influence and witness than many of our local churches do. We need their efforts!

Pastors are spiritual leaders, and are looked up to. Their words and affirmations are respected — and desired. The positive words and prayers of our pastors for each united work, or representative work, matter! Their words shape perspectives; they encourage; they build; they empower; and they enable.

Recap:

1. The only items that come to a pastors' group are those requiring or representing unity
2. We pray for and speak encouragement into all united efforts and their innovators generously.

I suggest pastors' groups are a place for clarifying vision in a wide range of areas for the city and nation — but not for discussing it's management.

3. WE DEFER THE *MANAGEMENT* OF UNITY THINGS TO SEPARATE MEETINGS

With many things getting small mention, the reality that they cannot all be discussed is obvious. Where things are discussed, the time allocated will often need to be small. In short, I suggest pastors' groups are a place for clarifying vision in a wide range of areas for the city and nation — but not for discussing its management.

It is right that there is a high level of empowering, delegation and trust. This is how large churches, and larger organisations, manage what they manage!

Regarding united things — for which a pastors' group might be the primary connection point, we have to recognise that those in the room are already mostly senior leaders. It is therefore right that there is a high level of empowering, delegation and trust. This is how large churches, and larger organisations, manage what they manage!

To consider a scenario, if a larger number of churches are involved in a particular united effort, a temptation for those involved will be to bring their own managerial matters into the pastors' meeting. There is a natural human dynamic to this. In view of the limited time most pastors' groups have together, this generally needs to be avoided.

To consider an exception, some who oversee united ventures might be lacking in experience or confidence. It is therefore with a pastoral sense of care that exceptions might be allowed — to encourage, affirm or reassure a leader. They might be feeling insecure in their role, needing confirmation that the group is behind them, or unsure if they are truly entrusted to lead in a given area.

However, to the most part, pastors' group meetings will be meetings for senior leaders — each capable of 'holding a sword' and leading a charge into battle alone (David's Mighty Men — 2 Samuel 23). Vision needs to be made clear, while managerial matters are discussed separately.

THE IMPORTANCE OF THE PROCESSES THAT MANY OF US FEEL INCLINED TO RESIST

The Western Christian tradition has often been guilty of separating the 'sacred' from the 'secular'. In this thinking, prayer is 'spiritual', while human effort to achieve something is 'of the flesh.' While every church leader I've ever discussed this topic with can agree this separation isn't Biblical, I suggest the thinking it represents is embedded in our thinking.

Specifically, if we discuss the need for prayer — many are keen. However, if we discuss the need for strategy — many will withdraw, because it is seen as an 'effort of the flesh'.

I point out that 'administration' sits within the gifts of the Spirit in 1 Corinthians 12. Human ability and human effort is not 'of the flesh.' It is the attitude of the heart that determines the nature of an action!

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We need simple strategy!

Here is a simple approach that can catalyse life and innovation.

I refer us again to Chapter 12, which shows how the various things that exist in the united space could be highlighted, encouraged, prayed for and therefore helped, all in connection with a quarterly combined prayer gathering. Four gatherings a year isn't difficult in many places. Synching their timing with the four terms of the school year makes simple leadership sense. I see no simpler way of ensuring that a *vision* of what we might be responsible for together is kept before us all.

In case the point is missed, the purpose of the prayer gatherings is, therefore, not only the prayer. Through our words and prayers we are concurrently building the perspectives and vision of our people *to see the city!* We are also building relationships amongst ourselves. This becomes a platform for teamwork!

As a second step, the same areas mentioned for united prayer in each quarter of the year (Chapter 12) *could likewise be brought to a pastors' group meeting beforehand*. This might only need 10 minutes to achieve. The purpose could simply be to highlight a dozen ministries or people who are working in the selected spheres for that quarter — to encourage everyone with a vision of all that God's people are doing in the city. You then pray blessing on them together, while having raised awareness of these various efforts and people in the process.

The purpose could simply be to encourage everyone with a vision of all that God's people are doing in the city. Faith and vision for increased collaboration in service to the wider city (and nation) would result!

This would be catalytic. This would endear increased support for or favour toward these united things — even if only in small amounts.

This would likely draw out stories about other things happening that were not mentioned too. Doing this would build a picture in the minds and hearts of the pastors of *all that we (the Church) are actually doing in this city*. This perspective would be transferred to their members through their words and attitudes. Faith and vision for increased collaboration in service to the wider city (and nation) would result!

IN SUMMARY

A pastors' meeting is unavoidably a 'hub' for the united efforts of the Church in each city and town. If certain things aren't considered by the pastors together, where else will they be considered?

In view of this, I suggest that the managing of necessary agenda in pastors' groups is a topic requiring more thought and discussion. This is especially true given the changes taking place amongst us, with an increased vision for unity, and regarding our potential united function.

The NZ Church is more united than many have realised. What churches are achieving together is amazing. We are concurrently in a season of change. Our unity is going to be more needed in our future than it has been in our past. Let's keep adapting — and let's keep this journey going!

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

A vocabulary we can agree upon

As a closing chapter for the book I'm delighted to share an articulation that I was unable to pen when first writing this book because of a lack of a shared vocabulary for unity things amongst our nation's churches.

The challenge came from the fact that our churches have historically talked very little about the dynamics of (united) Church leadership — as compared to (local) church leadership. Different church movements have also had different meanings for key 'leadership' words from the Scriptures — and some individuals have developed strong opinions on the meanings of specific words too.

Three years on, and with the thoughts of prior pages having been in discussion, that seems to have changed. The following is now a broadly representative vocabulary, and it will hopefully help this conversation about how we might better achieve our God-destined united function be engaged to a higher degree.

This chapter will therefore conclude this book with its originally intended explanation of the principles and boundaries by which our unity can become more functional. I suggest what is presented here is Biblical — but I have found that presenting this *without Biblical references or words* is necessary for the reasons noted above.

May Jesus continue to build his Church amongst us!

THE PURPOSE AND FUNCTION OF PASTORS' GROUPS

1. COFFEE UNITY

As articulated earlier in this book, the first purpose of a geographic pastors' group is relationship. These days, for humour, I call this coffee unity. Things move at the speed of trust.

2. PRAYER UNITY

However, the goal is not just relationship. Instead, it is that our hearts unite in love both for one another and the city or town we are all a part of. Beyond any need we might have ourselves, our desire is for the good of the whole community. In seeing a need, we therefore find ourselves uniting, for example, in prayer for the council (local Government), or regarding a community problem or issue etc. We become united in vision to see God work in the city or town as a whole.

3. FUNCTIONAL UNITY

As we pray, the thought arises: What could we do together here that we could not do apart? We find ourselves discovering fresh strategies that could make a difference, and that we're uniquely able to achieve *together*.

THREE QUESTIONS FOR PASTORS' GROUPS

QUESTION 1. WHAT COULD WE DO TOGETHER THAT WE COULD NOT DO APART?

This has been considered already.

I suggest this is the main question, or 'best starting question.'

However, there are times when the next two questions are also worthy of consideration.

QUESTION 2. WHAT COULD WE DO BETTER TOGETHER?

This is a far harder question because it requires Kingdom thinking. Beyond mere generosity, I suggest that true 'Kingdom thinking' is about self-sacrifice. For example, if one part of Christ's body serves with another — who gets the credit? Joining with some other churches 'for the greater good' might even be to the detriment of one church's independence and distinctiveness as a congregation. Will we do it? When, and why?

A simple story from a South Island church illustrates this principle well.

Unable to get a breakthrough in growth, a small church decided to close its doors. In doing so, they agreed together to all attend another church. *The reality — which I'm sure was not lost to them, was that there was actually no net loss in the Kingdom of God if they did this!*

Arriving at their new church they found that the regular roles of rostering, welcoming, worship leading, giving sermons, mowing lawns, doing accounts and preparing cups of tea were all taken — so they ran the youth group and started a couple of outreach ministries. The closing of the 'independent identity' of their 'church' now not only meant no net loss for the Kingdom; it had produced net gain!

We are five years on from this now — and I'm told by a leader in that church that these people are still the key leaders and initiators in the outreach ministries of that local church.

"...but wait — there's more!"

They still had a building. They offered its use to another church. Today that other church has grown — as has the church these people moved to join, and both churches are now embarking on building projects because they have both grown! So there is ‘net gain’ two times over!

When we partner with others behind a goal or endeavour we often sacrifice something. Sometimes what we sacrifice is who gets the credit — like when three churches get their youth to gather in one youth group, based in just one of the three churches. Sometimes, like in the above example, it is our very identity as a separate group. But of what importance is a local church’s name?

A congregation’s name and reputation in a community does have importance. The perception (‘brand identity’) people have of each local church does matter — because it is connected to the reputation of Jesus.

However, if we think it through, the separateness of each local church does not really matter. While there is nothing wrong with having different congregations — as they are like family units, their continued independence isn’t of high importance, as there is also only one Church in each city and town, right? This means the first question should be, “What is best for the Kingdom?”, not “What is best for my own local church?” This is why the second question of unity is so much harder than the first.

To put this differently, only two things really matter. People, and things that help people. A local congregation has value in as much as it is loving its people, while also helping other people. So, if we could achieve all this *and more* by uniting with others, that might be the right thing to do!

A hindrance to partnerships for some will relate to the heritage and history of their congregation. Shouldn’t we keep our local church alive “because it had an amazing call on it? We even ran a Sunday School of 300 back in the 1960s!” That story (history) is testimony, and it should be written down! Tell that story. Celebrate it. But the work of God in a prior era is no reason to maintain a work today. It is people, and things that help people, that

matter. The question today is, how could I serve Jesus best today? This takes courageous leadership.

So question 1 is, What could we do together that we could not do apart?

Question 2 is, What could we do better together? Here is question three.

QUESTION 3. WHAT COULD WE *BE* TOGETHER THAT WE COULD NOT *BE* APART?

With thanks to a friend for this articulation — the third question is a rephrasing of the first. What could we *be* together that we could not *be* apart? The answer is, ‘The creators of an environment, or culture, from which our *members* could become united!’ We could become the facilitators of united efforts *amongst our members* that go well beyond our own abilities or capacity as local church leaders!

As a statement, unity is not only for pastors; it’s for the Church. Unity is also not measured only by what the pastors do or facilitate together. It’s measured by the ability of Christians everywhere to work together when it counts. What I believe lies in front of us is a change in perspective through which we realise it’s time ‘to give unity back to our members’!

Unity is not measured only by what the pastors do or facilitate together. It’s measured by the ability of Christians everywhere to work together when it counts. The role of a local pastor is to create an environment out of which the members could be empowered and released to be all they could be for the Lord. This is likewise the role of pastors’ together in a city or town.

To illustrate: What is the role of a local pastor? Is it to be the CEO who knows about everything happening in that church to lead and manage it — or is it more about creating an environment out of which our members could be empowered and released to be all they could be for the Lord?

Most would agree it is the latter — in which case this is likewise the role of pastors’ together in a city or town! Our greatest function as a pastors’ group isn’t in what we lead as a group, but in what we enable our members to

achieve through their efforts and unity. Our role is to create the environment out of which they are released to unite together and innovate in their service to the Lord!

This highlights an important point regarding capacity, which we will come back to shortly. But first — boundaries.

BOUNDARIES FOR UNITED FUNCTION

I suspect one of the reasons many city and town pastors' groups historically reduced their purpose to 'just relationship' was because of bad experiences when people did bring agendas into the room. Because we had never (or rarely) discussed a framework for how we might discern what agendas should be in the room, nor the principles by which they would be managed, we were stuck. When agendas entered the room — they took over. People promoted their pet projects or initiatives — and the relational needs of the pastors stopped being met. Boundaries were broken, and trust undermined. The attendance began to decline as a result, until the group finally decided, 'No more agendas!' Two years later the attendance was back up again — and so the cycle would repeat. Many in ministry for a few decades will be able to attest to the reality of this cycle.

What may have been missing was *boundaries* suiting this level of united function! I suspect we hadn't yet sufficiently recognised the differences that exist between local church leadership and united Church leadership, and the principles and boundaries by which the latter works. Because these differences were not articulated, we had no framework together for the conversation, or for managing the challenges.

BOUNDARY #1. THERE IS NOTHING WRONG WITH INDEPENDENCE

If our starting question is, 'What could we do together that we could not do apart?', this immediately implies that there is nothing wrong with doing things apart.

Imagine a large church in a city *independently* running a city-wide event. They don't consult other churches. They don't invite ideas. They don't invite participation. They don't even invite donations. Instead, 'all by themselves' they get Council permission, invite guests, arrange facilities, venues and promotions — and then run it and pay for it. All we have to do is turn up with our friends and we find we're at an excellently run city-level programme that represents Christ well. So, are they independent in a way that is wrong?

We don't need unity
for unity's sake

I've illustrated likewise when speaking on this topic by referring to a TV outreach programme run out of one of our larger New Zealand churches. The programme is brilliant! It relates very well to non-believers. A programme like that could be a Church ministry run by a group of people from various churches — but in this case it's run and funded by one larger church. We thank God!

Boundary 1: There is nothing wrong with independence. We don't need unity for unity's sake! Nor do we even all need to be together in one place!

BOUNDARY #2. WE DON'T ALL HAVE TO

My easiest illustration is from a part of our own work — because to illustrate from someone else's work might be misunderstood. Do all churches have to help with the current annual 'Hope Project' national delivery of booklets to letterboxes? This certainly needs volunteers, right?

No, all churches don't have to help!

In fact, *none* have to!

None have to help financially either!

By being clear on these boundaries, we've been able to work with emotional freedom ourselves — while also enabling the freedom of others from any feeling of obligation coming from ourselves.

To push the illustration further, what if all the pastors in a city or town didn't want to help? This is a real scenario, so you know. I suggest the onus is back upon our teams to go to God about that, because God never made us the boss of any other person or church. God can make a way — and in these situations he has! This is about healthy boundaries!

The same value (or boundary) applies to every other initiative that desires to see churches working together. None have to participate — and none should be judged for not participating!

Boundary breaking in relation to this second boundary is where I suggest we have most often failed. Imagine a promotion of a proposed united effort to a group of pastors that incorrectly implies that everyone 'should'. Some agree to participate — while others don't. Those who don't participate feel pressure is being put on them to do so. Words carry an innuendo that criticises them for their 'lack of unity' with others. There is coercion!

Unity isn't uniformity!

When well-meaning people believe their thing is God's thing, they can inadvertently assume this means it should be everyone's thing. The tone of their words implies this. This is boundary-breaking. It betrays trust, and trust is foundational!

For a challenging example, consider a combined church prayer gathering is proposed. There is possibly nothing simpler and more compelling that we could be united in. I personally love these things too — but I suggest that it remains that churches do not have to unite in these. Remember, unity isn't uniformity!

To illustrate, consider the prayer style of these gatherings. Sometimes it is that of the more 'vibrant churches' — leaving those with a more traditional

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faith-style not feeling so comfortable. (Imagine the lights, the high volume that causes some old people to go outside during the worship in song, the enthusiastic yelling of praise to God, and everyone shouting out their prayers at once). Those churches then sometimes say the others should ‘get past the style differences’. There is some truth to this — and that is what makes it a dangerous argument because, ‘We don’t all have to!’

For a contrast, if the more traditional churches were organising the combined prayer gathering instead of the ‘more lively’ ones, and the prayer style was more formal and ‘subdued’, I wonder if the members of all those other ‘more lively’ churches really would attend, and keep attending. (Imagine a liturgical prayer service if that helps.)

The principle for united Church leadership is that God raises up different people at different times for different things.

This isn’t about right and wrong. Style differences exist — and ‘we don’t all have to!’ Consider this: We are united without ever meeting because we love the same God, read the same Bible, and are serving on the same mission! An approach to unity that is based in some idea that we’re all supposed to come together in one place isn’t what unity is about.

God’s Spirit can give his people the wisdom needed to work in unity in a city or nation — and all without any big gatherings in the picture!

Unity isn’t uniformity! We can be united without ever meeting. We can also work in unity in specific ways, and with great effect, all as the result of sensible strategies and simple communication lines — without ever meeting!

BOUNDARY #3. LEADERS ARE DISCERNED, NOT APPOINTED

Without use of Biblical terms, I suggest the principle for united Church leadership is that God raises up different people at different times for different things. The key here, as detailed earlier in this book, is that there is a difference in the way leadership works in a local church (small ‘c’), as compared to in the united Church (capital ‘C’).

The Book of Judges was the illustration earlier discussed. They had authority to appoint leaders in their tribes, and later in their cities. They did not, however, have authority to appoint a king. Only God would raise up a leader for the nation — when he wanted to. The onus was then upon the people to discern this, and God didn't always raise up the kind of people they expected (Ehud, Jephthah, Deborah, Samson, Gideon)!

People will rise to serve in various areas because they feel compelled to — and some of these will do so irrespective of whether they get paid or recognised. We need eyes to notice, and then to discern, and then to support if we feel God is up to something.

It is also possible that some might discern favour on one person, while others feel to support someone else. This could be God's purpose, rallying enough support to each, to enable what they have initiated. *This is how God works, and also how he could enable multiple citywide and national endeavours to come about and thrive at once!*

It is also possible that some might discern favour on one person, while others feel to support someone else. This could be God's purpose, rallying enough support to each, to enable multiple citywide and national endeavours to come about and thrive at once!

Ironically, without these good boundaries, the efforts of those who are pursuing unity can be the undoing of it!

God raises different people up at different times for different things!

Remember — we love the same God, read the same Bible, and serve on the same mission. Unity isn't uniformity. We are united without even meeting!

There is nothing wrong with independence.

We don't all have to.

Leadership is discerned, not appointed.

...and this is important because, ironically, without these good boundaries, the efforts of those who are pursuing unity can be the undoing of it!

SO, HOW MANY DO WE NEED TO GATHER TOGETHER FOR A THING?

I suggest the answer is ‘enough’!

This is a simple, but important, understanding.

Most united things only require a small portion of our people — and if we can really grasp this, a revelation awaits us regarding our capacity!

I am yet to discover any combined church effort in a place that really did need everyone to unite together. Most united things only require a small portion of our people — and if we can really grasp this, a revelation awaits us regarding our capacity! Meanwhile, it remains a temptation for all who promote an idea in the unity space to infer that ‘everyone needs to come

together’. Let’s be aware of this, because everyone doesn’t have to!

A FRAMEWORK FOR ASSESSING A UNITED VISION

To bring simple application to these boundaries for enabling united function, I see two key dynamics in connection with things that seem to gain favour with many pastors’ groups:

- (i) **The approach was non-coercive and open-handed**
Because involvement is requested not demanded, boundaries respected, and approaches empowering, no one feels manipulated or coerced, there is no reaction against the idea — which means the idea gets considered.
- (ii) **The goal was sensible**
What is proposed meets a need, and in a sensible way. It is useful, simple and empowering.

Sometimes a proposed goal isn't sensible or considered necessary in the way a person is suggesting — so churches don't support it. There can be many factors behind this.

Sometimes the approach of a person proposing a collaborative effort is coercive, maybe pursuing uniformity — so churches walk away. If we respect healthy boundaries, and take care with our words, it pulls people together.

In summary of boundaries, it is of note that emotionally healthy people gravitate toward emotionally healthy environments. As we increase the emotional health of our unity, through an active pursuit of healthy boundaries together, levels of participation with united things will increase!

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NEW LENS #1: THE CAPACITY OF OUR MEMBERS WHEN TOGETHER

How much might the members of our churches be capable of beyond what they already give in our local churches?

The capacity God's people have for bringing leadership to Kingdom things is probably far, far greater than all the leadership effort currently exhibited by God's people in recognised positions and roles inside our various congregations. To put that differently, there might be more Kingdom-leadership potential sitting in the memberships of our local churches than there is involved in the leadership teams of our local churches!

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What if we could release more of our members to *their* thing, and their ministry — *in collaboration with others*? New innovation ‘for the city’ is the answer!

The current annual Hope Project booklet delivery at Easter is a useful starting illustration.

8 years ago many pastors’ groups did not consider a volunteer delivery possible. Today a national volunteer delivery is being achieved each year, and we’re all discovering together that it’s simpler than we first realised. A city of 130 churches like Tauranga might have 34,000 eligible letterboxes for the booklets. We now know this only needs about 150 volunteers. If 15 churches are involved, that’s only 8 to 10 volunteers per church.

10 volunteers is not even everyone in one church small group!

So, do all the churches really need to unite for this? If we have united hearts, and some communication lines amongst us, what is our capacity really?

CAP (Christians Against Poverty) Debt Centres have spread nationally. These are run by people who are good at math — and good with people. These people aren’t always from the same local church. This is the body of Christ ‘working as one’ — and the pastor doesn’t have to be busied by these Debt Centres. Competent members can run them!

Pregnancy Choice Centres (or similar) are now spreading in our nation too. These are supported by people who have a passion to support young mums and their families through pregnancies where they can. Take a few people from a few churches, and it’s done! (Pastors can facilitate the connections between their members, but don’t need to be busied by these).

Te Hāhi is a ministry maybe similar to victim support (for a simple way of explaining it). This is now spreading from city to city, usually run by people with a heart for social justice and a desire to help people in their moment of need. Again, if 5 or 8 churches are involved, *it’s actually only about 5 people from each of those churches who are involved*. This is a remarkable illustration of our capacity when working together — because this ministry takes a lot

of effort. However, it doesn't need busy pastors. There are people in our churches with a heart for social justice, who consider the opportunity to help people in their moment of need a privilege!

Then consider various types of Chaplaincy. How much capacity is not yet tapped for this within our congregations — in service to schools, work places, rest homes, prisons and more?

Bible in Schools (now called Launchpad) is a united effort — and it's amazing to think of the numbers of teachers who have been going into schools right across the nation in service to this vision! These volunteer teachers also connect stories about Jesus with more people than many churches do — which is worthy of our notice. What is encouraging and needs noting is that these teachers are our people — and it only takes a few of them working together to connect with every school!

Then consider combined youth group events, combined food banks or op shops, counselling centres, combined Alpha courses or marriage courses or parenting courses, and more — run as the result of people from different churches coming together to serve in their areas of specialised interest or gifting.

Now imagine if all the above were happening in every city and town. Would the pastors' group be overwhelmed? My suggestion is that these things are possible, concurrently, in many places — and no one need be overwhelmed!

Pastors are informing their members of things that are happening or possible in their cities, and then releasing them to unite together in their various areas of interest and influence. This is what is releasing this otherwise-untapped capacity!

If we only function with the resources of one congregation, the limits of what we can do are very different to what is possible when we view ourselves together. If we also limit our capacity to what our pastors can personally lead

— it will be considerably limited. However, if we can release the leadership capacity of our members, we'll quickly see that we have more capacity than we realised!

How could we begin to release the people in our churches with 'specialist' interests to unite together more for our city? The starting key is our enabling of information and communication lines! We share vision — and this is why the managerial practices discussed in Chapters 12 and 14 are so vital! The leadership approaches shared are important — because they will be catalytic!

Right now, as an encouragement, we are seeing many of the above ministries coming about in many places concurrently. This is an evidence of the amazing job many of our pastors are doing in building a united perspective in their people. *They are informing their members of things that are happening or possible in their cities, and then releasing them to unite together in their various areas of interest and influence. This is releasing an otherwise-untapped capacity!*

NEW LENS #2: THE POTENTIAL OF 'IN UNISON' APPROACHES TO UNITY

If releasing members to unite is one approach to releasing more of our capacity, another is what I call 'in unison' approaches to unity.

Habits create culture. So what if 1000 or more pastors were to unite in certain habits — with the goal of generating a national effect or change? This is a specific area of our work, with ongoing encouragements related to about 15 such habits currently in play, with an estimated 200 to 1500 churches applying each habit their own way. (None are accountable to us in any of their applications).

For example, to see Christians engaging more in witness, and with public issues, what if we all preached an annual sermon series on 'The Conversational Skills of Jesus' — or similar. If messages were reinforced through small groups, we'd have tens of thousands (and then possibly hundreds of thousands) finding new confidence and wisdom to engage in conversations like Jesus, and even in hostile environments! Various key leaders would, in time, become

passionate about this matter also — and then promote it on their various other platforms. We could build a culture amongst us of wise and proactive conversational engagement. This would make a difference — and has been significantly achieved in recent years, even though many are not aware it is happening, as a united effort. Hundreds of leaders (and more) are intentionally engaged in their own way, each being entirely self-motivated — but all pointing in the same direction!

What if, in view of public media bias, pastors not only connected their members with access to a balance of information so they could consider two sides of a matter (like e-updates from Family First, NZ Christian Network and others), but also preached three times annually on a current issue? Many apparently don't do this yet. Some topics would admittedly need preaching with care. (The 'conversational skills for hostile environments' mentioned earlier might be wise for use in the pulpit in some cases.) However, we really could build a *culture* amongst ourselves in which our members seek out truth, and then engage wisely — because they are both informed and conversationally equipped! This is significant — *and 1500 pastors embracing habits like these in a small nation like New Zealand could enable changes that are felt nationally!*

The point is that, without need for uniformity or anything 'big', and without need for any extra programmes, we can achieve national objectives together by simply working 'in unison' toward common goals!

Our capacity — if we have communication lines amongst us that connect us with habits or ideas that are sensible, meaningful and realistic for the goal, is truly enormous!!!

The point is that, without need for uniformity or anything 'big', and without need for any extra programmes, we can achieve national objectives together by simply working 'in unison' toward common goals!

Unity is for God's people, and church leaders have a role to play.

IN SUMMARY

Unity is for God's people, and church leaders have a role to play.

Pastors' groups are unavoidably a central 'communications hub' for the wider work of God's Church in each city and town. Yet, the key isn't in pastors being busy. It is instead in what they can enable together that they could not enable apart!

I pray that the thoughts and strategic keys in these pages will bring freedom, and prove to be catalytic.

*May we 'stand firm in one Spirit,
striving together as one for the faith of the gospel...'
(Philippians 1:27-28).*
