



## “Calling God’s People Together to Love Our Communities to Christ”

is first and foremost: **an answer to prayer.**

Beginning nearly two years ago, leaders of the American church, ministry organizations, and marketplace networks from across the country have been praying intently, in search of a fresh new vision for the Church in the midst of our declining culture and the social turmoil that has increasingly characterized the dawn of the new millennium.

Their prayers gave thanks that in much of the world, there is cause to rejoice. The Christian Church is experiencing unprecedented growth in Asia, Africa, Indonesia, and other previously unchurched population segments around the world:

- The Chinese Church is growing by 20,000 converts per day,
- The Indian Church is growing by 25,000 converts per day, and
- The African Church is growing by 30,000 converts per day.

In stark contrast, however, the Western Church (Europe and North America) is actually *shrinking* by approximately 3,000 people per day. In America:

- The unchurched population has nearly doubled in the last 10 years:
- Three churches are closing for every new one that opens,
- If the unchurched population in America were a country unto itself, it would be the 5<sup>th</sup> largest nation in the world—which is why
- More missionaries are sent to America than to any other country, save one.

The predictable result of declining Church influence is the commensurate decline of Godly influence in our society. The astonishing decline in our social and moral culture is clear evidence that the Church has been remiss in its role as salt and light. Something is clearly wrong. What is God telling us?

Following a call to listen for God’s voice, understand His will for the Church in our generation, and join ourselves to Him in whatever work He calls us to, scores of national leaders of the Church began praying in earnest. And for the first time in anyone’s memory, praying leaders from across the country, across denominations, and across the myriad of ministry and marketplace organizations that encompass the Mission America Coalition heard one single, consistent message: *call God’s people together in our cities.*

“Calling God’s People Together to Love Our Communities to Christ” is a national call for unifying the Church at the city and community level, and mobilizing it for evangelism. And

despite discouraging aggregate numbers at the national level, there are many wonderful examples of cities where God’s Spirit is already working mightily.

While different cities have different needs and different manifestations of God’s grace as a result, some common themes and best practices have emerged among those who are leading the way. The Coalition has incorporated these into a strategic “framework” within which each city—and each church—can uniquely pursue its own calling, but yet be unified in their overall approach so that the collective witness—and cumulative power—of the Spirit can be magnified, modeled, and applied to bless the work in other cities across the country.

## **Common themes—Bedrock Transformational Principles**

### **1. Cities are transformed when people are transformed.**

**There is no shortcut.**

Community transformation is a life-changing process that becomes increasingly visible as the number and collective influence of Christians living an authentic biblical lifestyle in a city or community grows, and becomes so pervasive that darkness is progressively displaced by light.

**Our objectives are defined by our principles.**

Our objective is not a quest for utopia, a new approach to creating the “great society,” or even an attempt to make our cities and communities better places to live. A world with less poverty, a world with less crime, a world with less hunger, a world with less disease—is still the world. These are laudable and desirable outcomes, but they are realized in truth as simply by-products of transformed lives—of Christians loving their communities. Our goal must be higher: our Father knows that we have need of these things, but He asks us to seek first the kingdom and His righteousness, and trust that all these things will be added in due course.

### **2. People are transformed when God transforms them.**

**It is the Spirit that gives life, the flesh profits nothing.**

We are every bit as adept as the Pharisees of the 1<sup>st</sup> Century at making the outside of the cup clean and whitewashing gravestones, but we believe that neither the kingdom nor our communities will be built in the spirit of men’s “let us make bricks” (Genesis 11). Bricks are the product of man’s handiwork, made of earthly materials to serve the purpose of stone, but the Bible tells us that it is only as authentic “living stones” are joined together in the work that true transformation can emerge. One may plant, another may water, but it is always God who gives

the increase. Our role is to provide a clear, unencumbered channel through which His grace and the transforming power of the Holy Spirit may flow.

### **Without faith, it is impossible to please God.**

When that which is the exclusive province of the Spirit of God is taken up by the hand of man, frustration and failure are the inevitable result. We readily acknowledge that what we have undertaken together is far too big for us as mere men, and is doomed to fail if God is not the author and finisher of the work in each community. We have too often set our sights on that which can be accomplished by the work of our own hands, and too prone to declare victory at the outward appearance, when God is looking at the hearts.

### **3. God transforms people when His Church prays, cares, and shares.**

#### **We need simple, biblical, transferable principles.**

Changing a culture involves very different processes than simply implementing a new program or launching an initiative, because the objective is to create permanent, *genetic* change that self-replicates through a new DNA. It is not merely changing what we do, but literally changing our nature so that from this point forward, doing God's will in loving our neighbors comes *naturally* and *continually*, and is not something we merely undertake in campaigns.

We seek a new sense of unity in the Church, and a new sense of brokenness for the lost that binds us together and inspires our efforts to love our communities to Christ. We seek the simplicity of the gospel message, and resolve to build a stronger culture of **Prayer** to more fully engage His Spirit, build a stronger culture of **care** to more visibly personify His love, and build a stronger culture of **share** to more boldly speak from His heart.

#### **All other approaches are derivative.**

When properly understood, it is clear that most approaches to evangelism involve one or more of these three simple principles, or some close derivative. As a result, a wide variety of preferences for individual church styles and practices can be accommodated within the framework, while still holding the basic principles in unity—and thus in our collective witness—across many churches and throughout many communities.

The Coalition undertakes this effort not as a single ministry, but as a collaboration of many ministries working in concert as the whole church, taking the whole gospel, to the whole nation. Likewise, this is not one plan among many, but a framework within which many plans can be implemented, and many churches engaged together in the process.