

WHAT IS A CHURCH PLANTING PARTNER?

DO YOU WANT TO SUPPORT A NEW EC CHURCH BUT AREN'T SURE HOW? Becoming a church-planting partner is as simple as one-two-three.

1 COMMIT...to prayer! Paul wrote to the early church: "Devote yourselves to prayer, being watchful and thankful. And pray for us, too, that God may open a door for our message, so that we may proclaim the mystery of Christ, for which I am in chains (Colossians 4:2-3, NIV).

Prayer remains a significant way to champion modern ministry efforts. The congregation of Ebenezer EC Church in Brownstown, Pa., prays for Luis Gomez and the nearby ministry of Lancaster's Vida Nueva EC Church. The folks at Wedgewood Park EC Church in Youngstown, Ohio, partner with – and pray for – fellow ECers at Maranatha Christian Center in Highland Park, Ill.

Individual partners also offer prayer support. Bob and Pat Hartman of Cleona, Pa., have allied with Rev. Carlos Kelly of Iglesia Cristiana de York. The Hartmans count it a privilege to lift up the Kelly family and their congregation in prayer. Church planting partnership begins when we

join our hearts together in prayer.

2 CONTRIBUTE! Partnering with a church plant also involves a financial responsibility. We like to call it an investment with amazing and eternal returns!

The Message interprets 2 Corinthians 9:6-7 this way: "Remember: A stingy planter gets a stingy crop; a lavish planter gets a lavish crop. I want each of you to take plenty of time to think it over, and make up your own mind what you will give... God loves it when the giver delights in the giving."

An adult Sunday School class at Trinity EC Church, Fern, Pa., takes a monthly church-planting offering. The pastors at several Lancaster area churches personally challenged congregants to partner financially with Horizon Church in Allentown, Pa. Dozens responded. Elsewhere, youth groups, Adult Missionary Fellowships and other people just like you are investing in EC church planting every year.

3 COMMUNICATE! Church planting can be lonely work. That's why this third partnership commitment is so important.

Have just a minute? Send a quick

email. When you have a bit more time, write out a note and stick it in the mail. Pick up the phone to check in or – even better – arrange a visit to personally encourage the planter and his congregation. In 2 John, we read: "I hope to visit you and talk with you face to face, so that our joy may be complete."

Some folks from Mohn's Hill EC Church near Reading, Pa., make occasional visits to Vida Nueva EC Church in downtown Reading. Allentown New Bethany's leaders stay in touch with the growing congregation at our

Slatington Trinity restart church. This "personal touch" is what makes partnership complete.

So why not build God's Kingdom by becoming an EC church planting partner? Get more information on partnership and a list

of church planters and church planting ministries from Brenda Long, Church Planting Administrative Assistant (blong@eccenter.com or 1-800-866-7581).

"And pray for us, too, that God may open a door for our message, so that we may proclaim the mystery of Christ"

—Colossians 4: 2,3 NIV

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The Church Planting Newsletter of the E.C. Church



Rev. Luis Gomez & Rev. Ramon Mendez

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WHEN GOD DOES THE MATH — by Kolleen Long

WHEN GOD DOES THE MATH, one church plant can multiply to two congregations, with three more additions on the horizon. One such equation began a decade ago with the Vida Nueva church plant in Reading, Pa.

Rev. Ramon Mendez leads this congregation, which began in December 1997, chartered last year and is now transitioning to self-sufficiency. Currently, between 170 and 180 attend Sunday worship services. Up to 70 people return for a Tuesday night prayer meeting, plus the church also holds small Bible-study groups on Thursdays and Oasis – a program for teens and families – on Saturday nights.

"We also have a TV ministry," Mendez says, a cable program which airs across Berks County and includes segments from the sermon as well as music clips and other elements.

It was three years ago that the Reading congregation pursued the idea of planting a new congregation in Lancaster County. "We started having meetings in Lititz, in the home of one of our members who lives there," Mendez recalls.

The studies continued each week for about a year, with Mendez and other Reading members providing leadership until Rev. Luis Gomez came to lead the Lancaster congregation. Gomez was serving as dean of students at a Bible seminary in Montreal when Mendez contacted

him about the new church plant.

"I was ready to come back to Pennsylvania," Gomez said, and by August 2004, the second church officially began. Like its Reading sponsor, this fledging church chose the name Vida Nueva, which translates as "new life" in English.

"When we started," Gomez recalls, "we focused on the Lancaster people, reaching out through visitation and the children and getting to know the community. And the people started coming."

They began meeting on Saturdays in the facilities of Faith EC Church in Lancaster. They later shifted to Sunday afternoon worship with a potluck-style meal afterwards. "It's a communion meal," Gomez explains. "God gives us the opportunity to sit down and get familiar with one another."

The community is growing, with worship services averaging between 75 and 80 in recent months and attendance topping 100 on several Sundays. Vida Nueva Lancaster holds discipleship training on Tuesdays and prayer and Bible study on Wednesdays.

In addition, two cell groups meet at opposite ends of the city to reach families and neighbors of current members. Gomez also leads an evangelism outreach on Friday nights. Participants hand out tracts and, when the opportunity presents, talk to those they meet about spiritual matters. From these outreaches arose the opportunity to sponsor yet another church plant.

"Everything that is alive is supposed to reproduce."

—Rev. Ramon Mendez

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"We have been reaching four families from Ephrata right now," Gomez explains. "They are coming to the Monday cell because it's a lot closer to them."

In addition to ongoing training for this Ephrata group, the Lancaster church wants to sponsor another congregation in Columbia. "I've been praying and trying to get contacts there," Gomez says. "We are going to try to get the EC churches in the Columbia area involved."

Churches planting churches planting churches: this may sound like a clever catch phrase, but the vision statement of the Church Planting Commission is more than that.

"That's part of the DNA of a congregation," Mendez says. "Everything that is alive is supposed to reproduce. We understood from the very beginning that from a certain point we had to reproduce other churches."

In fact, the Reading congregation hopes to sponsor another church plant, possibly in the Allentown area.

"There are a couple of people in our congregation that are already praying for that in the sense that they are open to God to take them to those new places," Mendez says. "To start another church is part of the natural process of the church."

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Church Sponsors: Crucial in the Church Plant Equation

A sponsoring church not only provides the use of facilities or financial support, states long-time EC church planter Luis Gomez, but also helps to build bridges with people unfamiliar with their denomination. Gomez has helped establish 15 churches, including his present congregation.

"A sponsor is a vital part of the plan," he states. "We want our [new] churches to have contact with other EC congregations."

In Vida Nueva Lancaster, the congregation actually has two sponsors, Vida Nueva Reading and Faith EC Church in Lancaster, which shares its facilities with the Hispanic church plant. Although the new church originally held worship services on Saturdays, they now meet on Sunday afternoons. This provides more natural opportunities for members of either Lancaster congregation to interact.

"It was an opportunity to be more in touch with the people of Faith EC Church," Gomez explains. "They were eager to support our ministry here, and I wanted to have my people get their first impression of the EC

church people, and that has been working just fine."

In fact, the two congregations now unite for cantatas, Sunday School picnics, and other events. They have also participated in pulpit exchanges.

"We say it is only one church, we just worship in different languages," Gomez says. A key to this sense of unity, he adds, is his relationship with fellow pastor Bob Stahl, who leads Faith EC.

"Church planting is at the heart of God," Stahl notes. "If we can help with that by offering the building, we certainly ought to do that. I count it a privilege to do so."

A sponsoring church, Stahl notes, "pays a very minimal amount of money," but reaps benefits in terms of increased fellowship with other believers. "There's been a good relationship," he says.

The two pastors meet weekly to share a meal and pray for their overlapping ministries. "He's a wonderful fellow," Stahl says of Gomez. "We have a very solid relationship," Gomez affirms. "That carries to both congregations the idea that the two churches are growing together."



Faith EC Church in Lancaster

HOPE COMMUNITY CHURCH — by Rev. Robert M. Daneker, Sr.

Hope Community Church, Fogelsville, Pa., officially began as an EC church planting project in 1994, but its beginnings were far earlier. In the early sixties, Allentown expanded dramatically to its west and I felt it was a prime time for our church



Hope Community Church in Fogelsville

to expand with it. In the late 1980's Bishop Richard Cattermole challenged the Boulevard EC congregation in Allentown to mother a church plant in Schnecksville. Though that project never materialized, the interest in church planting remained.

In the 1990's, as I concluded my ministry as District Superintendent, the Lord moved in amazing ways to begin Hope Community Church. One miracle happened when four couples from Boulevard Church – who earlier offered to help with the

Schnecksville project – stepped forward once more to become the initial core group for this new church plant. An unexpected gift of \$30,000 and the core group's pledge of support for the first year provided the impetus to launch the effort.

Hope Community's leaders committed to a contemporary approach to worship, fellowship and mission. From lots of prayer and the use of contemporary approaches to music, drama and the arts, to lots of advertising and public outreaches, significant numbers of new families were touched by God's Good News. Lives were changed!

After years of meeting in rented facilities, Hope Community made a huge decision to purchase an eleven-acre site on which a new facility would ultimately be built. At the new property, the congregation began scheduling community events. Today, they continue to hold festivals, chicken barbeques with musical entertainment, an Easter egg hunt, and a fall

pig roast and car and cycle show.

In July 2005, the church building was completed and we were ready to worship, educate, fellowship and serve in this new facility. That fall, Bishop Michael Sigman conducted a wonderful dedication service featuring state-of-the-art sound and video technology, which we use today as we preach and teach. It's exciting to see what God is doing among us, with us, and through us. We're still having fun serving our "joy-giving Jesus" at Hope Community Church.

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Visit these sites and learn about today's exciting church multiplication movement.

Proclaiming God's Love IN THE CITY OF BROTHERLY LOVE

On July 1, 2006, the Evangelical Congregational Church launched a Latino church plant in Philadelphia. Comunidad Biblica Cristiana conducted worship services in Pastor Rolando Diaz' living room until attendances grew into the 30's. In mid-October, Sunday services were moved to Cedar Grove Church, 411 East Tabor Road, Philadelphia, PA 19120. Pray for the salvation of many new families and

strength and wisdom for Pastor Diaz and his wife, Doris. Thanks to the efforts of Pastors Dan Moury and B.J. Whitaker of Mt. Joy, PA, Trinity EC Church, a DVD highlighting this exciting Philadelphia ministry is available. Call or email Brenda Long (blong@eccenter.com or 1-800-866-7581) to request your free copy for use in worship services, Sunday School classes, mission events or youth groups.

