



CBAC MULTI-CHURCH COLLECTIVES: A NEW WAY FORWARD



WHAT IS A MULTI-CHURCH COLLECTIVE?

A multi-church collective is a partnership between two or more churches whereby the churches agree to partner together on one or more ministry programs or initiatives under the direction of a Church Collective Leadership Team.

Example 1: Different Strengths

A church collective could be shaped whereby two or more churches have different strengths. Perhaps one church has a stronger youth ministry and the other church has a stronger senior's ministry. The two churches could agree to enter a church collective agreement whereby each church benefits from the other and the two churches share those ministries in a collective agreement and the ministries are stronger together.

Or perhaps there are three churches in a similar geographic area. All three churches see the need for targeted outreach in the community as it relates to serving under-resourced families. None can do it on their own. But together, in a church collective arrangement, the three can initiate a partnership whereby they serve the community together with one, stronger, more focused initiative.

There are many examples of how a church collective/partnership could be shaped between geographically close churches. It is only dependent on the strengths of one church, the needs of other churches and a willingness to take a posture of humility and serve together.

Example 2: Lead Church & Joining Church

A Church Collective could also be shaped when a stronger congregation enters into a church collective partnership with a struggling congregation. Perhaps that congregation exists in a strategic location and has the passion and will to serve their community but needs more leadership and a strong partnership to "reboot" itself.

The Church Collective is beneficial to both churches. The "Joining Church" receives support, vision, direction and resources from the Lead Church. The "Lead Church" benefits by supporting a neighbouring congregation, extending its Kingdom influence and seeing expanded ministry and fruit.

In this example, the churches enter a "church collective" agreement and agree on a few specific areas of shared ministry priorities. The LEAD CHURCH takes the lead as it relates to clear vision and values, ministry priorities and direction. The JOINING Church takes a posture of humility and allows the LEAD church to provide the overall leadership as it relates to ministry direction in the specific areas of priority that have been agreed upon.

This model is different than the traditional “church merger” or multi-site model. It is NOT a “merger” where two churches become ONE or one congregation becomes a “site” of another. That might prove to be something to eventually consider, but in a Multi-Church Collective each congregation maintains organizational autonomy (maintaining a leadership board; membership; ownership of their building; CRA charitable number, etc ...). They place themselves under the authority of a LEAD CHURCH as it relates to ministry philosophy, shared vision, strategic direction and implementation. This is accomplished through the forming of a Church Collective Leadership Team that oversees the Collective and includes team members from each of the churches.

Together, this team would shape the strategy and develop a plan to focus on the agreed upon priorities. In most cases, it is wise to begin this process as a pilot project and reevaluate after a specified period of time.

WHAT COULD IT LOOK LIKE?

Let's identify two churches: Church A and Church B. Church A is a healthy, growing, mission-edge church. Church B has been struggling and declining and is interested in partnering with Church A in a “Multi-Church Collective”. Church B however, does have the necessary WILL to do “whatever it takes” and exists in a location that is strategic.

(Note: This example is related to a healthy church partnering with a struggling church. The steps could look slightly different if the Multi-Church Collective was a collective of two or more churches of similar health, starting a new initiative together.)

Step 1: Initial Conversation

Often the first conversation takes place unofficially. There is a “SOMEONE” that sees a brighter future and initiates a conversation with perhaps a pastor or a leader of a healthy, neighbouring church. This informal “coffee conversation” often sparks imagination and hope and leads to further conversations.

The “further conversation” involves assembling the key leadership people from each congregation. Church A should have the Lead Pastor and two or three other church leaders. Church B should do the same. The purpose of this meeting is simply to get to know each other, to hear each other's heart for Kingdom ministry and to gain clarity regarding Church B and the potential of a ministry partnership. In large part, it is about determining FOUR things:

1. *What is the current reality for Church B? What is happening that is positive and we can celebrate? What are the key areas of challenge? What does the future look like if it continues in the same way?*
2. *Is Church B in a strategic location? Is there opportunity for ministry and evangelistic impact if the congregation re-gained traction?*
3. *Does the leadership of Church B have a ministry and Kingdom “fire in their belly”?*
4. *Does the leadership and Church B have a “whatever it takes” attitude? Is there enough Kingdom desperation to choose the pain of change and embrace whatever is necessary to see that change?*

NEXT STEP: At the end of this meeting the ONE next step is simply to determine if there is the will on the part of Church A and Church B to move ahead. Either side can end the process at this point. Sometimes stopping the process at this point is clear and is the best choice. Sometimes it is clear to move ahead. Sometimes the group needs to be sent away for a short season of prayer over a week or two and reconvene for another conversation.

Step 2: Assemble the Church Collective Leadership Team

If the team senses that conversations and planning should continue toward a potential Multi-Church Collective, a Church Collective Leadership Team should be assembled. This team should be no larger than ten (preferably a bit smaller). Church A should have the largest representation on the team. (For example, a team of 10 could have 6 members from Church A and 4 members from Church B.) The assembling of this team is CRITICAL! Making sure that the RIGHT PEOPLE (positive, visionary leaders) are around the table will set the tone for the potential of the project.

Step 3: Gaining Understanding on the Multi-Church Collective Agreements

Clarity is ESSENTIAL. If Church B joins a Collective, what are they agreeing to? Some examples are:

- Church B will maintain oversight over their facility and responsibility for it.
- Church B will maintain their own budget and be responsible for it.
- Church B will retain their charitable status and be responsible for their own financial dealings, audits, charitable receipts, etc ... (ie. Church B will remain an autonomous church organizationally).
- Church B will maintain local governance. There will be a leadership team/elder's board that has oversight over the congregation as it relates to the items noted above for example. The Church Collective is an example of churches having both independence organizationally and interdependence as it relates to mission/vision and strategic direction implementation.
- Church B will place itself under the direction of Church A as it relates to the agreed upon ministry priorities/linkages. (egs. worship services; youth and/or children's ministry; outreach events; small group ministry, etc.
- Once the Collective is launched, Church A and Church B will assemble a "Collective Leadership Team" to lead the Collective. This Leadership Council will have 2-3 leaders from Church B as a part of this Council.
- Church A and Church B will write and sign a "Church Collective Covenant". The covenant will lay out the time frame. Once the covenant expires, the churches can evaluate and shape a new path forward. Perhaps a new covenant will be shaped. Perhaps the next step will take a different form. The covenant will also clearly identify the shared "ministry priorities/linkages". This becomes the working document for the Church Collective Leadership Team. Strategy and effective implementation of these priorities/linkages is the task of that team.

Step 4: Develop a Pilot Project as an Experiment

TIME FRAME: The time frame should be no less than 18 months and probably no more (at least initially) than 24 months.

What are the shared ministry priorities/linkages we are agreeing to?

It is essential that the team identifies the KEY AGREEMENTS in certain areas of ministry. What critical areas need to be addressed? This will serve to guide the Church Collective Leadership Team in its role and will enable the pilot to have some measurable outcomes.

What are some examples?

- **Ministry Vision and Core Values:** Church B embraces the ministry vision and core values of Church A and with Church A seeks to embody these in its local context. (This is an ESSENTIAL critical linkage!)
- **Weekend Worship Gatherings:** Often it makes sense to align weekend service themes, perhaps shared preaching at times, shared multi-media resources, etc ...
- **Training Events:** It is often a wise use of resources to regularly combine and share training events as a Collective rather than create individual events.
- **Small Group Ministry:** Is it possible and advantageous to share a small group ministry as it relates to training and various resources/curriculum, perhaps even some joint small groups in the Collective?
- **Youth Ministry:** Are there ways to share or combine a youth ministry? What would that look like?
- **Children's Ministry:** Can we share a children's ministry focus in terms of similar model, similar curriculum, training, etc ...?
- **Communication:** Is there a way to combine communication strategies, maybe even some "Church Collective" shared branding?
- **Neighbourhood Serving Projects:** Can certain serving projects be shared and multiplied so the entire Church Collective is sharing the same serving project in its own neighbourhood?
- **Joint Congregational Gatherings:** Consistent joint events like Worship Celebrations are often helpful to increase traction and knowledge that our Collective is in this together in different neighbourhoods. Can we come together 2-3 times per year as a Church Collective to celebrate what God is doing through the Collective and in our neighbourhoods?

Step 5: Write a Church Collective Covenant

At this point it is time to write a Church Collective Covenant document that Church A and Church B agree to. It does not have to be complex.

- *An introduction of how this Collective came to be and who has been part of its development.*
- *The Church Collective Agreements should be clear. (*See Step 3 above – clarity on these is essential to avoid misunderstanding)*
- *A clear time frame for the pilot project.*
- *Clarity on each of the essential “Ministry Priorities/Linkages” that are being made. (*Step 4 above) What are the critical linkages that are joining Church A and Church B at this time? These linkages will set the agenda for the Collective Leadership Team. The linkages become the measurables that team will strategize to implement.*
- *Signing the Church Collective Covenant by the Collective Leadership Team members.*

It could also be wise, especially for Church B to have the congregation vote to endorse the covenant/pilot project. The value in that could be when people begin to experience some of the pain of change, it has been a broad-based decision agreed upon for a specific time frame. Once the time frame is over, both Church A and B have the freedom to determine if another chapter in the Collective would be valuable.

NOTE: Every situation is unique and has differing dynamics. The above example will have similarities and differences to other church situations. The example is not intended to be rigid, but only serves as a guide. Each Church Collective will need to be shaped according to its own uniqueness.

The essentials in shaping a healthy Multi-Church Collective pilot project are:

1. *Clear and honest communication*
2. *Clear ministry priorities/linkages for the pilot project*
3. *A strong Church Collective Leadership Team*
4. *A start and end date for the pilot project*
5. *A signed Church Collective Covenant Agreement*

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Visit atlanticbaptist.ca/churchlink for additional information and examples, including written and video stories from other churches in Atlantic Canada.