

National Pastors' Prayer Network

Connecting Leaders for Prayer and City Transformation

NPPN interviewed Jim Tomberlin (bio below) . . .



NPPN: Jim, you've recently moved from leading/serving on a pastoral team to leading a collaborative effort among a variety of congregations and ministries - What drew you to this position?

JT: As a senior pastor of an emerging mega-church in Colorado Springs in the 90's, I came to believe that God had given me influence in the community that should be used beyond the walls of my congregation. I came to understand that God had given me gifts of leadership with an entrepreneurial bent that could be used to mobilize the Body of Christ for church growth and community transformation on a regional level. I saw the impact of working with other churches to serve our community together and the positive effect it had on my own congregation and on me as a leader. It was a win-win situation. We were doing good things together in the community and that was also good for our congregations.

I am convinced that if the Body of Christ in a local community can come together in unity and mobilize around its common redemptive mission, it could become an irresistible force for good that could revolutionize an entire region. When I came to Chicagoland to pioneer the multi-site church strategy for Willow Creek Community Church, I worked on forging networks of church leaders across Chicagoland to serve and impact the region together. Catalyst is one of those networks.

NPPN: Explain the vision of Catalyst. . .

JT: The vision of Catalyst is to mobilize the Body of Christ for a spiritual revolution in Lake County, Illinois. We believe that when the Church is revived and the lost are spiritually awakened in Christ community transformation takes place. Acts 2 provides our biblical model for a unified Church working together for a spiritual revolution that results in community transformation.

At Catalyst we believe we have been called to renew the hearts of God's people, reposition the Church for revival, restore the reputation of Christ in our community, and reconcile people to God in our region. Our desire is to be a "catalyst" for renewal and spiritual awakening all across Chicagoland—mobilizing tools, resources, and events and most of all the body of Christ to help bring a spiritual revolution to our region, beginning with Lake County.

NPPN: Describe the difference in perspective; how does a congregational leader think differently than a county-wide leader?

JT: Congregational leaders tend to focus primarily on their local church. County-wide leaders think about their congregations in context of the larger Church—the Body of Christ in their region. They see the Church the way God sees the Church—One Church, many congregations. County-wide leaders see themselves as part of the larger Body of Christ and value the unique contributions of other local congregations, ministries and organizations in the community to the greater Kingdom effort.

NPPN: What does "One Church, Many Congregations" mean and, maybe more importantly, what are the implications of this principle for local church leaders?

JT: Throughout the New Testament, the Church is described in terms of cities—the church of Jerusalem, Antioch, Corinth, Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamum, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia, Laodicea, etc. You get the idea that when God looks down on a region, He doesn't see individual churches---He sees One Church, His Family meeting in multiple congregations across a geographical area.

This is confirmed theologically in 1 Corinthians 12, "*For we were all baptized by one Spirit into one body...the Body is not made up of one part but of many.*" Ephesians 4 states that "*there is one Body and one Spirit—just as you were called to one hope, when you were called—one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all.*" Jesus affirms this spiritually in his prayer recorded in John 17, "*Father, may they be one, as we are one.*"

Somehow Christian leaders think unity is nice, but not necessary. The reality is that we are called to a functional unity based on our spiritual unity in Christ and it is the basis for credible proclamation of the Gospel on a regional basis. Jesus prayed this for us in John 17, "*May they be brought to complete unity to let the world know that You sent me.*" God designed the Church locally and regionally to function as a body with all the parts working together in harmony. As the Apostle Paul reminds us in 1 Corinthians 12, "*When one part of the body suffers, we all suffer; when one part prospers we all rejoice.*" This is the way healthy local congregations are designed to function individually and corporately.

NPPN: Transformation has become a buzz-word in city-reaching and collaborative partnerships. What defines or best describes the goals of a transformational movement? Is it possible to know if transformation has taken place? Is this just another fad or program?

JT: Eric Swanson of Leadership Network describes the paradigm shift that occurs when city-reaching, collaborative efforts take root in a community and its leaders. You can find the full article at www.catalystweb.org :

1. From building walls to building bridges.
2. From measuring attendance to measuring impact.
3. From encouraging the saints to attend the service to equipping the saints for works of service
4. From "serve us" to service—from inward to outward focus.
5. From duplication of human services and ministries to partnering with existing services and ministries.
6. From fellowship to functional unity.
7. From condemning the city to blessing the city and praying for it.

8. From being a minister in a congregation to being a minister in a parish.
9. From anecdote and speculation to valid information.
10. From teacher to learner.

Effective and sustained church-based community transformation will show tangible results both in the Church and in the Community. If the Church in a region is not showing a substantial growth in baptisms and church attendance then our efforts will not sustain long term. But, if the Church is seeing significant Christ-awakenings occurring that translate into transformed lives and local congregational growth; then we should see over time, a transformed community as reflected in lower crime rates, divorce rates, abortion rates, and poverty rates. Spiritual and social demographics are useful and tangible ways to measure and evaluate our effectiveness.

NPPN: What are the most significant reasons these transformational movements stall?

JT: The team at Mission Houston (www.missionhouston.org) has identified the typical reasons that transformational movements stall and I have added a few others as well:

1. Leaders not having a clear idea of where they are going and a workable map to get there.
2. Leadership teams moving from a catalytic role to one of sponsoring and owning ministries.
3. Current leaders failing to engage senior leaders from the diversity of the Body of Christ, especially prominent leaders from the African American and Hispanic community.
4. Current catalysts not seeing and not moving beyond prayer and relationships only.
5. Leaders committed to the transformational process not engaging in community based ministry.
6. Senior leaders not leading the way.
7. A low level of commitment by leaders leads to an administrative rather than a catalytic leadership role.
8. The strategic initiative is hijacked by some other competing agenda.
9. The initiative is under funded, typically beginning with the leadership team.
10. Leaders not giving priority to fostering spiritual vitality and relational priority within the pastoral community.
11. Leaders and others not understanding the holistic and comprehensive nature of transformation, so settling for something less.
12. Thinking too regionally and not going local enough in relationships and initiatives.
13. A failure to mobilize believers and leaders from the marketplace.

NPPN: Who has had the most influence on your thinking about community transformation?

JT: Peter Wagner, John Dawson, Robert Lewis and Jack Dennison have captured a lot of the principles of city reaching/community transformation. Eric Swanson's writings with Leadership Network on the Externally Focused Church have been instructive as well. John Perkins and the Christian Community Development Association have also had a profound impact upon my thinking.

NPPN: What is the easiest mistake to make when asking leaders to work together?

JT: Not giving them something to do, something to focus on, a hill to take. Leaders are wired for action. Prayer and fellowship are not motivators for leaders. They see prayer as a means to an end and fellowship as a by-product of taking a hill together.

NPPN: Where is the community most open to collaborating with the Church?

In the suburbs I see believers who want to meet the basic needs of under-resourced neighborhoods with food, shelter, and basic services. In urban areas missionally oriented believers want to partner with schools—helping to provide a safe and quality education for our children.

NPPN: When is a community ready for transformation?

JT: When the local "anchor pastors" embrace the unity of the Body of Christ and take ownership as the spiritual gatekeepers of their community, then the community becomes poised for real transformation. It begins with local pastors, but must move beyond them and engage the masses who are sitting in the pews to participate in that transformation on a practical level. Sustained community transformation will not happen without mobilizing believers in the marketplace, ministries and organizations already existing in the community. The pastors cast the vision and empower the people. The people get the job done.

NPPN: Why are mega-church pastors so rarely involved in these kinds of efforts?

JT: All pastors have to resist the tendency to think their church is the center of the universe. The larger the church, the easier it is to become consumed with the needs of the congregation to the neglect of the larger community beyond the walls. City reaching efforts will not be sustainable and successful without the engaged leadership of the "anchor pastors" which should include the local mega-church pastors.

NPPN: How should they be invited into the process?

JT: Leaders don't get "invited into a process", they launch movements! Leaders are always drawn to the bold, compelling "grand" vision. When they get a picture of what could happen if the Body of Christ could get united in a practical way, then they will pick up the mantle of leadership. Prayer leaders should pray that the local mega-church pastors see the vision and impact of a local unified Body of Christ. I am encouraged that the emerging mega-church pastors of the 21st century are more missional in thinking beyond the walls of their own congregations.

NPPN: List a few resources that have served you well.

Fast Company Magazine—This is a secular magazine with many articles on Social Entrepreneurship. www.fastcompany.com/homepage/index.html

City Reaching: On the Road to Community Transformation by Jack Dennison This is really the textbook for city reaching along with John Dawson's book Taking our Cities for God which is so useful to intercessors. Dennison's book is very comprehensive. I always go back to this book.

The Church of Irresistible Influence by Robert Lewis The pastor of Fellowship Bible Church in Little Rock, AR shares the Little Rock story—one of the most effective church-based community transformation examples.

The Tipping Point: How little things can make a big difference by Malcolm Gladwell (The rest of the title tells why this book is important! Sometimes reaching an entire region or nation can seem to be such an impossible task. This book brings the task down to real possibilities.)

Mission America---www.missionamerica.org---The education/sharing information site for Mission America is www.cityreach.com/. This site and the Mission Houston site have a lot of really useful articles on the subject.

Mission Houston---- www.missionhouston.org/

The "Transformations" Videos---George Otis is the person who "originated" the concept of spiritual mapping to help make prayer and intercession more effective. His video "Transformations" has been so inspirational for so many and it proves that transformation on a larger scale is not only possible it is already happening in many places around the world. The Sentinel Group is his ministry. www.sentinelgroup.org

Arthur Burk of Plumblin Ministries has a set of tapes on the "The Redemptive Gifts of Cities" that are also instructive. www.plumblinministries.com

JIM TOMBERLIN

Bringing churches together for kingdom impact has been a life-long obsession for Jim Tomberlin. God has utilized Jim in a variety of ministries from pastoring a church in Germany, to growing a mega-church in Colorado Springs, to pioneering the multi-site strategy at Willow Creek.

As the Director of Catalyst in Chicagoland, Jim is leveraging his three decades of pastoral experience as a spiritual entrepreneur, international church leader, mega-church pastor, alliance-builder, visionary communicator, city-reaching specialist, and multi-site pioneer to help local churches fulfill their destiny.

Jim holds a B.A. in Anthropology from Georgia State University and a Masters of Theology from Dallas Theological Seminary. Jim and his wife, Deryl, have three grown children.