



Attitudes

Present in Cities
with Strong Church Unity

Gospel Movement

(noun)

A united, holistic, sustainable effort by the citywide Church to seek the peace and prosperity of their city (Jeremiah 29:7). Common union found in Jesus Christ provides the foundation for relational trust on which all collaborative efforts are built.

UNITED:

The united citywide Church working together with other sectors of society.

HOLISTIC:

Living out and proclaiming the Gospel in word and deed.

SUSTAINABLE:

Long-term vision and commitment to the city.





First off...

What do we mean by **church unity** in the context of City Gospel Movements?

Church unity is a theological reality with very practical implications.

Church unity is the reality by which local followers of Jesus who belong to different congregations in a city are knit together in oneness to make up the citywide body of Christ (Ephesians 4:3-4).

In other words, church unity is realized when the various little “c” churches in a city recognize they are a part of the big “C” citywide Church.

The practical implications of this theological reality are expressed through the various ways multiple congregations pray, serve, and share the Gospel *together* in their city.

The citywide Church is made up of various denominations, cultures, worship expressions, theological leanings, strengths, and weaknesses. And though these differences are real, the same hope, faith, Lord, and baptism are the shared beliefs that carry greater weight than the aforementioned distinctions. The Apostle Paul calls this togetherness “the unity of the Spirit” and exhorts believers to “make every effort” to keep and strengthen this unity (Ephesians 4:4-6).

Rob Kelly, leader of For Charlotte in Charlotte, North Carolina explains church unity in a three part trajectory:



1 Union: the theological reality that we have been perfectly united to God and each other *in* Christ. This reality is the fruit of God’s redemptive mission in the world that culminated in the life, death, burial and resurrection of Jesus Christ. By the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit, we share in the oneness that the Father shares with the Son (John 17).

2 Relational Unity: Understanding our union with God and each other, we are called to make every effort to maintain the unity of the Spirit within the body of Christ by treating one another virtuously (Colossians 3:12-17; Ephesians 4:1-6).

3 Operational Unity: As the Church lives in relational unity with one another, loving each other as Christ commands, we are called to turn that unity outward as we operationalize Christ’s mission as a united body of Christ. It is through operational unity that we express our conviction that unity serves as the greatest declaration of the Gospel to the world.



5 Attitudes Present in Cities with Strong Church Unity

Through our conversations with 250+ City Gospel Movement leaders, we identified church unity as one of the key determining factors of a city movement’s health and sustainability. Here are **five attitudes** that we consistently observed in cities with strong church unity.

1) *We put the Kingdom over Church-ianity*

- **A win for one of us is a win for all of us.** When we see a church who has a successful outreach or is growing, we celebrate because the Kingdom is growing. A Kingdom-minded leader understands we are all on the same team.
- **Territorialism is absent.** We do not care if our logo is seen, or if we get stage time. This is not about us, our church, and our agenda. This is about something much bigger than any one of us. We simply want to be a part and play our part.

Over the years we’ve introduced pastors who have come to plant churches in our city from the stage during weekend services. That’s what we do as a church — we bring other people up and champion what they’re doing. I really believe there’s not one church that has it going on, but the one Church does.

James Gleason | Hillsboro, Oregon

2) *We have more in common than distinct*

- **We commit to the key common denominations of the historic Christian faith¹.** Varying worship styles, programmatic preferences, and theological expressions are significant but do not hinder us from becoming friends and working together.

¹Not all city movements have a written document that outlines foundational shared beliefs. Many city movements refer to the Nicene Creed or The Apostles’ Creed as the document that outlines the partnering churches’ common beliefs. City movements that do not have a written document outlining shared beliefs likely experience relationships where common faith is understood from the basis of genuine relationship.



- **We want the same thing.** We share a love for Jesus Christ and a passion for people to encounter and know God. We desire to see our city peaceful and prosperous for all inhabitants. We believe the unity of the Church is a witness of God's character to the world. With these shared convictions², we work together.

We've been praying about how to engage in our city every Wednesday for the last five and a half years. God has allowed us to come to a spirit of agreement that has been obvious. This spirit of agreement has been a key signpost for us that we are going in the right direction. Krista Sisterhen | Columbus, Ohio

3) *We understand church unity is hard work*

- **Church unity is a conviction, not a fad or trend.** Our schedule will oppose church unity and say we are too busy. The enemy will oppose church unity because unity is a witness to the world of a God who aches for reconciliation. Our human nature will oppose church unity because it is easier to go fast and go alone, or simply remain comfortable and stick with people and traditions that are familiar. And the unfortunate reality is, not every church leader will get behind church unity. In the midst of opposing forces, we determine to maintain the unity of the Spirit.
- **This is going to take effort.** The unity we desire to see will not happen by default. It requires leaders who refuse to remain offended — who commit to working through disagreements rather than allowing disagreements to sever relationships. We desire to be persistent and humble. We understand church unity is a muscle that will atrophy if not engaged. The natural inclination of churches is to look inward. It's easier that way, but we resolve to work for church unity.
- **We bend our schedules and our budgets to align with our conviction.** If we continue to operate in autonomy, we will continue to get the same results we have been getting for years. We commit to show up to meetings, give time to get to know other leaders, and view this as a long game knowing that unity takes time to develop. All worthy pursuits take time. The potential for collaboration and the sustainability of our city's Gospel Movement stand in direct correlation to the strength of the relationships among church leaders.

²Core belief statements or requirements for being a partner in a city's movement may differ. However, from our research of city movements, we have seen these shared convictions (a love for Christ and passion for people to know Christ; a desire for the city to flourish; and a commitment to the unity of the church as a witness to the world) are the ones that are most widely shared and provide the foundation for city movement work.



We understand that our budgets are one of the greatest revealers of our priorities, so we plan ahead and steward our resources so that we can allocate funds to the citywide Church. This may look like giving ten staff hours per week to focus solely on city engagement, contributing money to monthly pastors' luncheons, or helping fund a community coordinator in a local public school.

Kingdom collaboration happens in three stages. Pastors and leaders move from thinking 'That's an interesting concept' to 'This is a good idea' to 'This is our driving conviction and I'll change my schedule and budget to this aim.' Ben Rudolph | Lake Norman, North Carolina

4) *We acknowledge differences... and celebrate them*

- **We do not deny our differences. Nor do we mean unity is homogeneity.** This means we appreciate where we are different rather than insisting others conform to our preferences. Without our differences within the citywide Church, we would not be able to reach those who are not yet a part of the church and who are different than our local congregation. Our differences also allow us to more intricately and accurately reflect the heart of God (Revelation 5:9-10).

We recognize that we come from different denominations, cultural backgrounds, neighborhoods, and socio-economic situations. We represent different ages, genders, passions for various initiatives, and have been in the city for varying lengths of time. Each of these differences provides richness and strength to the citywide Church, rather than reasons for remaining divided.

- **We need different strengths to reach the city.** One church is known for their outreaches to the poor. Another church is characterized by passionate worship, prayer, and evangelism. And yet another church has a long history in the city and strong relationships with city leaders.

Just like we celebrate different strengths within the individuals in our own church, we can celebrate different strengths and cultures within the citywide Church. One church will be able to act as a bridge to civic leaders. Another church will be a catalyst to engage the marketplace for Christ. And still another will be a force to train younger generations. We are all needed.

We see ourselves as spiritual diplomats. We can speak the language of churches across the spectrum. Ben & Mary Bain | London, England



5) *We posture ourselves as learners and listeners*

- **The Church has often spoken when it was time to listen.** We have assumed we know the right solutions without fully understanding the problems. But in order to work with other sectors of society to solve problems and be an effective witness, we seek to walk in humility.

We value the professionals in business, government, and the community as experts who can help us as church and ministry leaders understand the complexities from their perspectives.

As our cities change at an increasingly rapid pace, we posture ourselves as perpetual learners of culture and the real people who shape it. We show up at city meetings we do not lead because we want to keep a finger on the pulse of our community. We take new ways home on our commutes so that we can enter into different neighborhoods. We take time to get coffee with people with whom we would not normally rub shoulders so that we can hear their stories from their perspective, rather than hearing them secondhand.

The first year I had 200 one-on-one meetings with leaders in Evansville. I met with leaders in all channels of culture to learn about what got them excited, what challenges they were facing, and to thank them for what they do in the city.

Ross Chapman | Evansville, Indiana

These are five of the key attitudes we have consistently observed in cities with strong church unity. As church unity strengthens, so does the depth of collaboration and city impact. We hope you are encouraged by this resource.

Let us know how you used this resource by sending us a note at:

info@citygospelmovements.org.



Additional Resources for Church Unity

Listen:

Enroll in City Gospel Movements 101 — featuring Rob Kelly

Do the Impossible With God in Your City — featuring Adam Durso

No Space for Egos in This Worship Leaders' Network

[Access all City Gospel Movements podcasts here.](#)

Read/Watch:

How do you facilitate effective pastors' networks? — Practical steps and principles from San Francisco, California

Taking Church Unity to the Next Level — 40 pastors commit to deeper relationship and engagement with one another and their city

Church Unity in an Un-churched City — Portland, Oregon

God is Moving in Kansas City — One pastors' journey of realizing there is *one* Church in his city

[Access all Church Unity resources here.](#)

We began to ask the question:

*"What could we or should we do to serve the
city that no one church can do alone?"*

Mark Ford | Akron, Ohio



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