

Exhortation to Join the Great Plains Association of North American Baptist Churches

Background from Pastor Cory:

I was asked during the interview process if I had any problems with Discovery Church being non-denominational. My answer was something like this: “I don’t get excited about a church because of the denomination that it’s in. I get excited about what that individual church believes and is doing with their ministry. So, I could happily pastor a non-denominational church for the rest of my ministry calling. However, at the same time, it’s not healthy for a local church to have no ministry partnerships with any other churches. So, I’m fine with non-denominationalism but I’m not ok with anti-denominationalism. I like local church autonomy, but not local church isolation. I believe in the authority of the local church but not in avoiding cooperation with and service to other churches. So, if Discovery were to pursue alignment with the Great Plains Association of NAB churches it would be with this same spirit: retaining our local church authority (e.g., control over our statement of faith, covenant, constitution, calling of pastors, etc.) but also having formal cooperative relationships with other like-minded churches (e.g., shared mission trips, fellowship opportunities, pastoral coaching, etc.).

Another bit of important background information is the distinction between a denomination and a conference of churches. Sometimes, “denomination” means that there is some higher body of authority over the local church. This is not the case with the NAB. This is why they prefer to be called a conference of churches. They are locally governed baptist churches (just like we are) with enough theological alignment to cooperate in various ministry efforts.

With that serving as background let’s get into some reasons for alignment:

Reasons for Joining the Great Plains Association of NAB Churches

- Pastor Cory and Discovery have shared history with the NAB. Pastor Cory was trained and ordained in a NAB church plant from 2007-2013. Discovery Church supports NAB missionaries Bud and Lois Fuchs. Likewise, The TPA largely consists of NAB churches.

- Their core doctrines are virtually identical to our own statement of faith
- The Great Plains Region consists of robust, vibrant, biblically conservative, missional churches.
- Alignment with the GPA provides access to our pastors for one-on-one coaching from life-long, experienced pastors/mentors. Not only this, but it formally connects the pastors to other like-minded peers that sharpen and encourage them.
- Alignment also provides the church access to other experienced pastors in the event of a pastoral transition or “short leadership bench”. Provisional leadership can be provided by the pastors/elders of other NAB churches to get the church through a season of pastoral transition.
- Alignment with the GPA formally connects us to other churches we can rely on for seasonal ministry efforts (e.g., mission teams to staff a VBS or outreach event)
- Alignment with the GPA formally connects us to other churches that we can serve and enrich (e.g., we can host annual meetings, theology summits, pastor retreats, or send our pastors to do pulpit supply in fledgling churches, etc). We'd be honoring the Lord and building up the body of Christ outside our own walls.
- We would be formally aligned with churches that have experienced the same kind of struggles that we have suffered. This alignment would create opportunities for “sharpening” relationships and consoling relationships that advance both our ministries.
- We would be a model for the community and for other churches of Christ-like cooperation with others - we would be modeling that the Christian faith should not be practiced in isolation from others.
- There is no required financial contribution or pressure to send money to the NAB. Of course, there will be occasional, seasonal opportunities to send money back into the GPA. Of course, we will seek the Lord's leading in donating to the GPA but there is no pressure or requirement on our church to financially support the GPA or the NAB.
- Alignment with the GPA also communicates clearly to the community and to guests what our theological convictions are.

- Alignment with the GPA makes us eligible for financial support. The GPA has an endowment fund and a church planting/revitalizing fund which allows the Association to financially support churches that need a little help developing ministry efforts. This is last on the pro list because it is the lowest incentive. We believe that God would continue to provide for us whether we joined the NAB or not.

Potential Challenges:

- Alignment with the GPA communicates clearly to the community and to guests what our theological convictions are. Our statement of faith and our church practice is very baptistic. Formal alignment communicates theology and could potentially scare people away that should linger longer so they can grow to be open to our statement of faith and practice.
- Not every church in the NAB will be as theologically conservative as we are. The NAB strictly shares our ethics and theology of the family, marriage and sexuality. They strictly protect the same core doctrines that we do. But there is going to be variety nationwide regarding secondary issues like methods of evangelism or women's role in ministry. Much of this variety is controlled at the regional level. In other words, the healthier the region, the stronger the churches are.

**Reasons for Joining the Great Plains Association of NAB Churches: Summary of
Points Listed Above**

- Shared history and ministry efforts: Bud and Lois Fuchs, The Timothy Pastoral Apprenticeship, Pastor Cory's ordination and training.
- Doctrinal alignment
- Largely solid NAB churches in the region
- Coaching and networking for pastors
- Support for the church from the Regional Minister: pastoral transition support, leadership support, etc.
- Connections to other churches for ministry support
- Connections to other churches that we can enrich with our gifts.
- Potential financial support for various ministry needs/expansions.
- Connections to other churches to fellowship with, grieve with, celebrate with, by sharpened by
- Models Christian cooperation
- No financial commitment on our part is required.
- Communicates to the outside world and guests, in part, our basic theological convictions.

Potential Challenges:

- Communicates to the outside world and guests, in part, our basic theological convictions - i.e., someone may rule out our church too soon.
- Not every church in the NAB is equally like-minded - there is going to be a degree of practical differences.