

DISTRICT CONFERENCE REPORT

2022



THE ALLIANCE



Dear Church Leader,

You are reading these words because you are participating in your District Conference, and I want you to hear my “thank you” for that engagement. As a church-planting, church-advancing, mission-mobilizing movement, we believe that we are at our best when we’re functioning in community . . . a Christ-centered, Acts 1:8 *family*.

These are challenging days to be a family. Wouldn’t you agree? Whether it is our family of origin, our local church family, or denominational family, there are growing temptations to isolate and/or alienate. In direct contrast are the numerous directives and examples of the Early Church who overcame great obstacles and made Spirit-led efforts to function as the body of Christ in community.

Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace. —Ephesians 4:3

If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone. —Romans 12:18

Let us spur one another on toward love and good deeds. —Hebrews 10:24

Let us not give up meeting together . . . —Hebrews 10:25

Let us encourage one another and all the more as you see the Day approaching. —Hebrews 10:25

I encourage us today to follow the same Spirit of the Early Church who called us to live in a life-giving, grace-showing unity. Engaging in relationship with your district peers can be a practical expression of this value.

Meanwhile, The Alliance is more effective in advancing the gospel to our nation and world when we band our resources together. Your engagement in C&MA initiatives provides a synergistic effect of mission fulfillment. So, I **thank you** for your participation in national efforts such as:

40 Days of Prayer

Great Commission Day

Church Planting/Greenhouse

EquippingU

President’s Monthly Video Blogs

Missions Emphasis

Year-End Offering

Our redesigned website is loaded with helpful resources to enhance your communication efforts. Alliance Life and the Alliance eNewsletter are effective communication tools. Our restructured Great Commission Fund is proving to engage new mission-minded supporters. The relocation of our National Office (known as Project ReImagine) has the wind of the Spirit giving us ongoing momentum.

tum. We're grateful for the numerous evidences of God's kindness as we celebrate dozens of church plants, thousands of baptisms, and countless acts of love-driven, Spirit-led ministry.

In the pages that follow, Tim Crouch (VP for Alliance Missions) and Terry Smith (VP for Church Ministries) briefly share their hearts. Together, with all of you, we seek to *live a life worthy of the calling we've received* (Ephesians 4:1) as we *put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness* (Ephesians 4:24). This is the family you are part of. **We're grateful for—and the better for—your engagement.**

Pressing on together with you,



John Stumbo, President

"ADAPTING TO NEW GLOBAL REALITIES"

Alliance Missions – Timothy D. Crouch, Vice President

The Lord continues to entrust and empower our Alliance family with a significant role in the harvest. Over the past year, 722 Alliance international workers have been active in 63 nations around the globe. This is the fruit of faithful responses to God's call upon churches in districts like yours. Alliance Missions functions to extend and empower your reach to peoples of the world who need the gospel and who are in a position to share it with others.

RENEWED POSTURE OF ALLIANCE MISSIONS

Since Council 2019, we've encouraged full embrace of the broad set of vocations and modes of ministry needed in today's world. What we call "The New Face of Alliance Missions" really amounts to recognition that we've innovated for the sake of least reached and most vulnerable peoples. It is vital that we remain focused on the important Alliance outcome of raising up church networks that multiply and carry the gospel to the remaining unreached. But we won't likely get to plant churches if we don't come to serve. Thus, CAMA's development specialists and marketplace ministries professionals, alongside the mixed-profession but church-planting focused aXcess teams, are even more vital today than in past decades. And Envision's ministries in more than twenty cities worldwide contribute to this synergy and provide ways for many others to explore and grow in their own sense of calling within these ministry contexts. The international workers of these four specialized structures of Alliance Missions are all products of your churches and worthy of your support and partnership.

REALIGNED PROCESS FOR FUNDING THE MISSION

It is this embrace of all our mission efforts and workers, and of the two strong currents of giving among Alliance people, that have driven our redesign of the Great Commission Fund. Our goal is to align all our international workers more strategically with benefit from both general and specific giving preferences of donors and churches. This allows churches like yours to continue your giving traditions while motivating new participants and deepening generosity—whether it comes from giving to the whole or focusing on a specific worker's ministry. The funding message of our workers is becoming more harmonized as they clarify both the "ask" and the benefits for both general and specific giving. We are thankful that the new process is creating overall lift. Because both types of giving are vital to all workers and their ministries, we encourage churches not to venture too far too fast from previous giving patterns. At the same time, freedom exists to grow giving by appealing to church attendees and other potential donors to give in a way most naturally motivating for them.

REDEMPTIVE PRESENCE IN A SHAKEN WORLD

In our world, upended by crisis and polarized by ideology, the redemptive presence of the gospel through the lives, love, and language of God's people is desperately needed. Where the Church is, there is hope. But where the Church isn't, we send our called ones just as our Father sent His Son to us.



This year, challenges to missionary presence continued to rise. At any given time, about ten percent of our IW staff are kept from being where they long to minister. One team of workers had to be removed from a beloved and fruitful medical ministry location because of extremist threats.

But when one door closes, God opens others.

- Fresh opportunity is being explored among very unreached people groups of one nation with few believers that holds missionary graves from previous seasons' attempts.
- As a result of the past two years' disruption, there is a major reorientation of strategies among one of the world's largest language groups.
- New works have been launched in Japan, Europe, and both Central and South Asia.
- Many new doors that were opened to receive food and medical aid through the pandemic remain open now for local believers and international workers who are seen as trusted and caring.
- Church networks of the Alliance World Fellowship brought help and hope to many in what was the most far-reaching and impactful instance of their global collaboration ever.
- Many of those same churches of our Alliance worldwide family are now sending international workers of their own, extending gospel presence to places where none of us could go.

God is faithful in His purposes. Years like this past one teach us that God's ways are not frustrated by, but rather often propelled by moments of crisis, change, or challenge. His mission will not fail, nor will those who are emboldened by His faithfulness. May we always be among them!

"ADVANCING MISSION IN THE MIDST OF A CHANGING ENVIRONMENT"

Church Ministries – Terry D. Smith, Vice President

When we reflect on the last couple of years, the phrase “changing environment” may seem like an understatement. In March 2020, church life instantly changed. As the year went by, things became more challenging. Numerous debates sprang up in the Church over the various ramifications of COVID-19, over how or whether the Church should respond to racial injustice, and over political debates that surrounded the presidential election. Most church leaders spent 2021 trying to figure out the state of their churches—who was with them, and who was not.

Thank you, pastors and leaders, for enduring these challenging months as you sought to continue advancing the mission! Be reminded by Revelation 2:1 that Jesus walks among His churches. His presence is with you. He is aware of your situation and knows your struggle. He is present in power to help you and your church. He is continuing to do His work through your ministry endeavors despite everything that is going on in our nation and world. Please know that your Alliance leaders have a deep appreciation for your faithfulness and perseverance.

While we are awaiting the results of the 2021 Local Alliance Church Annual Report, we are encouraged by some big picture outcomes of the year. There were 58 new expressions of Alliance churches (church plants, multi-sites, affiliated churches) in the United States. 52 of those were either new plants or multi-sites, which exceeded our annual goal of 50. Additionally, we anticipate that 48 new projects will lead to church plants, and they entered a pipeline that now contains 125 projects. Our church closure rate dropped from 2.8 percent to 2.2 percent. We finished the year with a net gain of six churches. After a few years of net losses, both 2019 and 2021 have both shown net gains. We’re praying that this is a new positive trend, since every local church brings a gospel presence to the community where it exists.

Much has been written on the post-COVID recovery of the Church with various conclusions being drawn. Whichever voices are right or wrong, the One who is Lord of the Church has not changed; His assigned mission for us, His Church, remains the same, and His promise to build His Church is unwavering. As we make sure our eyes are on Him, I believe that advancing mission in our current environment will require a refocus in at least three ways.

REFOCUS ON THE GOSPEL AND THE KINGDOM OF GOD

I recently spoke with a pastor from the Middle East who leads a network of house churches. In his country, the Church has no influence in government, and Christians have no religious freedom. Evangelism is illegal. Yet, he and his fellow believers are engaged in sharing the gospel despite the risk and are seeing people come to faith in Christ. Meanwhile, the Church in the United States is often too focused on our influence with government and seeking to maintain religious liberty—which by and large, we already have. Evangelism is legal, and we have vast amounts of freedom to live out and share our faith. Yet, too often, we do not steward that freedom well. The Church in the United States needs to refocus on the Kingdom of God over the kingdom of this world. We need to refocus

on the gospel of Jesus Christ as the only message that brings hope and change. May the Lord grant you His wisdom and courage to engage your community with the gospel.

Resource: I believe you will be encouraged and helped as you watch and listen to Rick Richardson of the Billy Graham Center for Evangelism on EquippingU Live: https://www.bigmarker.com/cmalliance/EqU-Found-Me?show_live_page=true

REFOCUS ON DISCIPLING DISCIPLEMAKERS

In mid-2021, I spoke with an Alliance pastor who had been in his current assignment only a few years. He had led the church in undertaking a relocation and replanting process. The church was growing, but with COVID-related issues, they had lost a sizeable percentage of their congregation. He said, “We didn’t have time to disciple them well enough to weather the storm.” His short time in the church provided a legitimate excuse; however, I believe many of our churches need to own up to not discipling people well enough. We must get refocused on intentional and intensive discipleship—to make sure people are grounded in the Word and mobilized to share it. In this way, we teach them to experience life in the Spirit, help them clarify to which King and Kingdom our allegiance belongs, and help them have a sharp focus on our mission as disciples to be disciplemakers. I encourage local church leadership teams to spend time prayerfully asking how they can disciple people so that they have deeper roots and broader influence for Christ’s Kingdom.

Resource: Check out *Launch* at <https://www.launchdiscipleship.com/>. This is a two-year discipleship intensive that is wrapped around the local church through the lens of Alliance doctrine and distinctives.

REFOCUS ON LIVING IN THE FLOW OF THE SPIRIT’S POWER

In a recent EquippingU Podcast interview, we spoke with the leaders of an Alliance church in Aliquippa, Pennsylvania, a 100+ year-old church that is being revitalized. As they seek to fulfill the mission of Christ, they are placing a good Alliance emphasis on experiencing all the gifts and manifestations of the Spirit. They are being used by the Lord as conduits of the supernatural power of the Spirit. Even in the midst of this crazy season, they are seeing people’s lives transformed and are multiplying themselves in new expressions of the church. Speaking of a changing environment, more and more people in the context we live in are unchurched and disbelieving in God and His truth. In this environment, ministry in the natural won’t cut it. We must get refocused on living and walking in the Spirit, moving in His power, and being open to His supernatural manifestations. As in the days of the Early Church, only Spirit-empowered believers will be conduits of transformation as Jesus intends. May the Lord grant you bold faith to step into all that the Lord wants to do in and through your church.

Resource: Read or reread the position of The Alliance on Spiritual Gifts, called “Expectation Without Agenda” (<https://cmalliance.org/who-we-are/what-we-believe/perspectives/> - see section on Spiritual Gifts.) Pray through what this might look like in your life and church.

Our Lord is sovereign and seated firmly on His throne. He is allowing and using what is going on around us in a way that will ultimately advance His purpose. Often, times of crisis cause us to reevaluate what we’re doing, to make necessary changes and adjustments, and to sharpen our focus on His mission for us. May this be the case as we continue to navigate these unprecedented times.



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