

EXPECTATIONS AND JOINING

DOCUMENT 8

We will look at expectations of partner churches, and how to join our partnership according to these headings:

- Expectations
- Joining
- Information for Advance
- FAQ's about expectations, joining and leaving

EXPECTATIONS

The simplest way to explain partnership is to say that partner churches *actively and joyfully live out and promote our four pillars of partnership, as laid out in our 8 documents*. The four pillars of partnership are:

- Similar doctrine and values
- Shared mission (planting and strengthening churches)
- Genuine relationship
- Suitably gifted (and recognized) leadership

A careful reading of these documents, coupled with time spent talking with other Advance leaders and time spent at Advance gatherings, will help a church understand partnership.

JOINING

Although our assessment of potential partner churches is thorough, it happens via *relationship*. A relational approach is best because:

- It's the most *comprehensive* approach - alignment "on paper" can easily miss crucial elements. Also, it is impossible to cover every eventuality and answer every question on paper.
- It honors the nature of the church as a *family*, something Advance is passionate about. It also draws the church into relationships in the movement before they become a partner church.
- It means that we can *tailor the journey* to partnership to best serve the particular church, context and culture.

Here are some suggested steps towards partnership. All of these except the first and final steps can happen in any order:

1. **Interest:** A church expresses interest in Advance.
2. **Read:** The entire eldership team should carefully read these documents.
3. **Visit us:** As many of the elders as possible should visit several Advance gatherings, particularly *hub* gatherings and *continent* gatherings and, ideally, our annual *global* gathering. These gatherings will help you understand Advance, help you make friends and help you get a sense of whether Advance is the family that the Lord wants you to be part of.
4. **Have us visit you:** In ordinary circumstances, a couple of Advance leaders (usually someone from the *continent* team and another local leader) will try to visit your church, meet your team, answer questions and get a feel for the culture of your church, to help work out if Advance will be a good fit for you.
5. **Talk thoroughly through alignment issues:** Although there will be many smaller conversations along the way, there needs to be one big conversation between all your elders (not just the leader) and the Advance leaders who are helping your church towards partnership. In this conversation, *both parties should be double-checking that there is sufficient alignment for partnership around our four pillars of partnership*. Use these questions as a basic guideline for this conversation.
 - Have all your elders read all the Advance documents; and have you discussed them as a team?
 - With regards to each document, what aspects are you most excited about? What aspects are you concerned about? Are there any aspects that you disagree with, or which you feel you cannot give yourselves to whole-heartedly?
 - Are there any other questions, concerns or ideas that you have? And, are there any other questions or concerns that we have from the Advance “side?”
6. **Acknowledgement of partnership:** While we don’t subscribe to “signing on the dotted line,” we are clear that partnership is a serious thing, and a moment that both parties should be clear about, and should celebrate. To this end, we ask that your eldership team email Advance expressing your decision to join our partnership. We will then communicate to the Advance family that you have become a partner church by email/website, and introduce you and pray for you in person at the next suitable Advance gathering.

Note that, in terms of *time frame*, our priority is to be *thorough*, rather than quick. When it comes to testing our four pillars of partnership, only the first one (similar doctrine and values) may be aligned quickly, while the others (shared mission; genuine relationship; suitably gifted and recognized leadership) will take some time to develop/test. In most cases, the journey to partnership takes a year or two.

FAQ'S ABOUT EXPECTATIONS, JOINING AND LEAVING

Are church planting and strengthening efforts optional or obligatory for partner churches?

We don't like words like "obligatory," because they imply a "we have to," rather than a "we get to," motivation. We run Advance on a "we get to" motivation, as this reflects the motivation of the gospel. Churches choose to become partner churches because they are convinced by Scripture that they should participate in planting and strengthening churches, and therefore eagerly join in this worthy endeavor.

Aside from the things we all do together to assist with planting and strengthening (prayer, financial giving, leadership training), each church will contribute selflessly to the mission according to their capacity, but without compromising the integrity of their local mission.

What is required in terms of travel for pastors and elders of partner churches?

We find that pastors/elders benefit in different ways through connecting with Advance in the different regions (hub, continent and global). Even elders who are well-connected locally find it very enlarging to connect at the global level. Therefore, we encourage the lead pastor and the elders (and wives and key leaders) to be *100% involved at a hub level* (where travel is minimal), as well as to *prioritize involvement in their continent* (minimally, this would usually mean attending the annual continent gathering), and attend the annual *global gathering as often as funds permit*.

How many visits will a partner church receive?

Firstly, it depends on the *needs of the church* - churches without elders, or in crisis or in transition, will need more input. Secondly, it depends on *the ability of the church to receive input* through other modes (churches need be able to receive input at Advance gatherings [2 Tim. 2:2] and through other resources). Thirdly, it depends on the *availability of people and financial resources*. Fourthly, it depends on the *size and effectiveness of the hub*.

Is becoming a partner a moment or a process?

Both. It is a *process* because relational connection and value alignment take time, but there will come a *moment* when partnership is acknowledged.

What is the process for a church to leave Advance voluntarily?

It is as simple as making both Advance and your local church aware that your church is leaving Advance. In light of our value of brotherhood (and common decency), any disagreements should come to light very early on, giving everyone unhurried time to resolve it, hopefully in a favorable outcome for all concerned.

Under what circumstances might a church be involuntarily removed from Advance?

This would probably only happen if, after unhurried and brotherly discussion, it became clear that there was a significant compromise around any of our four pillars of partnership, such as doctrine and values, shared mission or genuine relationship, or if there was a clear deficit of respect for the leadership of Advance.