



Reception

Becoming a Location Partner

One of the Ten “R” s for Plotting a New Congregational Course

Reception is one of at least ten choices available to congregations who need to engage in transitions and changes that could lead to transformation as they plot a new course for their congregation. This is when a congregation becomes a location partner with other congregations and meets in the same facilities.

Sharing facilities or “nesting” other congregations within a congregation’s facilities are words and phrases used over the years for what is increasingly called “location partners.” The title is not as important as the concept. Whatever it is called it requires radical hospitality to share congregational facilities with one or more congregations--particularly when your congregation is the owner or feels ownership of the facilities.

This should never be seen as a casual arrangement. It is—at best—a significant and intimate spiritual and strategic relationship that moves much deeper than simply having someone who is a landlord for other congregations who need a place to meet. In fact, the concept of becoming a location partner really has two intensities and dimensions of sacrifice.

First, is where there is a primary congregation who owns the facilities, and it allows other congregations to temporarily or permanently share the facilities with them. The congregation that owns the facilities is the landlord in this situation and works out how and when the tenant will use the facilities. Some congregations are location partners with multiple congregations and may also have other ministry organizations housed in their facilities. Many of these situations have a parent-to-child relationship.

Second, is where the congregational facilities are owned by an incorporated organization made up of representatives from multiple congregations and ministries who are location partners. In this case each congregation and ministry shares responsibility for and ownership of the facilities. No single congregation or ministry can enforce demands against another. The organizational structure of these situations is an adult-to-adult relationship.

Why Become a Location Partner?

Here are seven reasons for becoming a location partner. Perhaps you can think of more.

1. Because the facilities outgrow the congregation, and perhaps the congregation has not been able to keep up important maintenance of the facilities. Other congregations are offered space and either charged rent or asked to participate in building maintenance, renovation, and beautification.
2. Because the congregation who owns the facilities is willing to offer space to other congregations and ministries who would use the facilities, and there is a commitment to work out a schedule that works for all congregations.
3. Because the congregation who owns the facilities as part of their missional commitment desires to offer their facilities as an incubation center for new congregations.
4. Because the cost of facilities in some locations make it difficult for one congregation to bear the cost of the facilities so they choose to become location partners and with other congregations.
5. Because of the economics of facilities in major urban areas, congregations who are targeting different demographics form a location partnership and build or renovate facilities they will all use.
6. Because of program efficiencies where multiple congregations choose to be location partners and have one Christian education program for preschoolers, children, and teenagers.
7. Because a congregation who ceases to exist or relocates offers their facilities to their denomination, and the denomination chooses to house multiple congregations in the facilities.

How Does a Church Become a Location Partner?

Like every choice available to congregations, become a location partner has both opportunities and challenges when thought and action are focused on how to do it. Here are seven things to consider.

1. Becoming a location partner, as with other choices, is not just a business transaction. It is a spiritual and strategic adventure. Congregations should only enter into a location partner arrangement if they feel this is something God is inspiring in them. Step one is asking God.
2. Particularly when sharing resources with other congregations—whether you own the facilities or not—there must be a focus on the facilities belonging to God and being a gift from God, and not something of which the congregation is proud and feels ownership. Step two is being honest about any feelings of ownership.
3. If your congregation owns the facilities, then step three is to acknowledge that God loves the congregations with whom you will partner just as much as He loves you. Be kind and considerate. All people of each congregation are persons of worth created in the image of God to live and to love.
4. Step four is to do whatever is reasonable to renovate and beautify the spaces other congregations will use and be sure they are of similar quality as the space you use. Never suggest that a certain space is “good enough for that congregation.”
5. Step four is to wipe your church calendar clean and negotiate in equal partnership with the entering congregations as to who needs to use what space on what days and at what times. Develop a schedule that blesses each congregation.
6. Develop a written covenant between the congregations that describe the relationship. Review and renew it each year. Developing such a covenant will be the first opportunity for each congregation to be seen as an adult in the relationship, rather than there being adults and children in the character of the relationship.
7. Have a worship service of dedication for each congregation when each new location partner relationship initiates. Also, hold joint worship and/or fellowship experiences with all location partners three or four times each year.

What is the Impact on the Church Becomes a Location Partner?

The impact can be very positive. Here are seven possibilities.

1. If becoming a location partner was deeply felt as God’s empowering vision for both the congregation who invites and the congregations who accept, then powerful and positive outcomes and impacts are certainly assured.
2. The church facilities once again are seen as places of great programs, ministries, and activities. The smile on the faces of many people tell a story of joy. Perhaps joint strategies are developed between the congregations that provides a synergy of impact.
3. People in the inviting congregation who see the facilities as belonging to God will be grateful for this new opportunity in ministry, and for the lives that are touched with God’s unconditional love. Their hearts may leap with joy.
4. People in the inviting congregation who see the facilities as belonging to them will be angry that the location partners do not respect the facilities, in general, and various rooms, in specific, with sufficient amount of care. Their burden will be heavy, and they will have a hard time letting go and letting God guide the relationship.
5. The entering location partners will be grateful for the space but will not understand the stories the walls of each room tell about the heritage of the hosting congregation. Perhaps regular times of storytelling between the congregations will help build a deeper gratefulness for all congregations.
6. If the church facilities are in what is now a diverse community context, the congregations present may transform the overall ministry in these facilities to one reflecting the full character and nature of the community context.
7. If the original congregation in the church facilities ever ceases to exist, then the vitality and vibrancy of the overall witness of the congregation develops a whole new life that may carry on for many decades. This speaks to the need for some type of legal legacy relationship to be worked out as the relationship matures with other congregations.