

AUSTIN CITY LIFE
A Church Planting Prospectus

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AUSTIN CITY LIFE
An Executive Summary

(1) Vision and Values:

We are Passionately Committed to:
**Cultivating communities of Spirit-led disciples who Redemptively Engage Peoples
and Cultures through Christ for the Glory of God.**

Truth · Worship · Community · Discipleship · Mission · Culture

(2) Rationale:

1. **Great Commissions** – *the biblical imperatives to make disciples and plant churches.*
2. **City Ministry** – *a commitment to redemptively changing social fabric of the city.*
3. **Strategic Value of Austin** – *focus on Austin as the second highest creative class city in the U.S with a projected population double by 2025.*
4. **Theological Distinctives** – *Reformed in doctrine, Baptist in sacrament, missional in nature.*
5. **Missions Potential** – *seeking to reach and mobilize the ethnic diversity of Austin for the nations.*
6. **Churchplanting Movement** – *initiating a churchplanting movement in creative class cities around the world.*

(3) Strategy:

Creative Class in Focus; Transclass in Scope. Richard Florida has argued that the creative class is the strongest economic force in America. Austin ranks second among the U.S. creative class cities. This class is ethnically and vocationally diverse, including occupations as different as musicians and entrepreneurs. Their common traits include creative talent, a value of tolerance, and an orientation to technology. This class is generally un-churched and unaware of its social identity and cultural influence. If these people can be reached with the gospel, they can become a formidable force in bringing about ethnic, economic and spiritual reconciliation in Austin and beyond.

(4) Ministry Philosophy:

**Expository Preaching · Blended Worship · Intergenerational Community · Missional
Focus · Elder-led Leadership**

THE VISION

Austin City Life is passionately committed to:

Cultivating Communities of Spirit-led disciples who Redemptively Engage Peoples and Cultures through Christ for the Glory of God.¹

What follows is a summary of the vision, rationale, strategy and values of Austin City Life (ACL). In an effort to extend the visible reign of God and the redeeming work of Christ in Austin and into the nations, we dare to dream of a *churchplanting movement* in Austin, Texas that will ***cultivate communities of Spirit-led disciples who redemptively engage peoples and cultures through Christ for the glory of God.***² In short, we seek to make disciples who live life redemptively in, by, and for the triune God, leading to the renewal and transformation of their communities, cultures and fellow citizens. These disciples will comprise a city-centre church that cultivates, engages, and renews Austin through Christ for the glory of God. ACL is a trinitarian, Christ-centered, disciple-making, church-planting, community/people/culture-renewing church—a church significantly shaped by its high view of the sovereignty of God, its deep passion for the supremacy and intimacy of Christ, and its redemptive influence on the city, States, and the world.³

Preliminary research reveals three peoples/cultures that comprise the urban centre: African Americans, Hispanics, and Anglos. The growing minority population primarily works in the working and service class industries, both of which flourish as a result of Austin's exponential urban growth. The cultural and economic center of Austin is significantly shaped by the Creative Class, an emerging global class of urban professionals, artist-bohemians, and the educational elite. Richard Florida ranks Austin among the top Creative Class cities (alongside D.C, San Fran), assigning it first among Creative Class regions in the U.S.

Bordering the developed city centre, lay the minority neighborhoods comprised primarily of Hispanics and some African-Americans. In order to redemptively engage the urban population of this rising city, I envision a city-centre church that works from the inside-out, starting with the peoples and cultures of the city and planting churches as our influence and outreach extends beyond the center to the periphery. To this end, ACL is ***Creative Class in focus, Transclass in scope.***

This cannot be done *alone*. We require the collaborative gospel power of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit in order to take on the spiritual forces of the world, the flesh and the devil in fulfilling this vision. We will be opposed by visible and invisible forces, by the city and by our sin. This makes the gospel even more necessary, sufficient for our forgiveness and for our forging ahead. We are insufficient for these things, but God is all-sufficient for all things. We plant; he grows. It is our hope that ACL, in collaboration with its daughter churches, existing churches of Austin, and other partnerships would prophetically, redemptively, and compassionately engage the peoples, communities, cultures and city of Austin and beyond.

¹ Imparting and implementing this vision will invariably emphasize different aspects of the vision from time to time. The challenge will be to recognize the seasonal emphases without excluding certain aspects of the vision.

² See "Vision Statement Unpacked" document, Jonathan K. Dodson.

³ A church that is Reformed in soteriology, Missional in ecclesiology, Baptist in sacrament.

THE CORE VALUES

Truth · Worship · Community · Discipleship · Mission · Culture · Kingdom

TRUTH

All truth is Trinitarian truth.

In an age when truth is no longer true, we are unwaveringly yet unpretentiously committed to grounding everything we do in truth. When speaking of truth we do not conceive of disembodied doctrine or do-it-yourself religion. Instead, we conceive of truth as something that is essentially personal and communal, existing in the reliable revelation of the triune God—Father, Son and Spirit—which is infallibly conveyed in and through the Old and New Testaments, the Bible.

All men rely upon something in order to make sense of their world. Instead of relying upon isolated finite human wisdom to comprehend our purpose and our world, we look to God's gift of wisdom to man through the Bible. Though *our* comprehension and application of the Bible are imperfect, this does not diminish *its* veracity any more than an inexperienced driver renders a stick shift unreliable.

Although the Bible is the only triune God-introducing source of truth, God has left his imprint elsewhere—creation, science, arts, culture. Because nature subsequently reveals things that are true ($1+1=2$), **we are principally committed to engaging and learning from all disciplines because all truth is, in the end, trinitarian truth.** We believe this approach to life honors the special and general revelation of God, resulting in citizens who will responsibly and redemptively engage other citizens and the city.

In the end, truth transforms peoples and cultures, souls and societies, precisely because it corresponds to the gracious and redemptive revelation of God in Christ to the world. Truth should simultaneously humble and excite us, as it leads us into true community and true humanity.

CHRIST-CENTERED WORSHIP

All things are in, through, and for Jesus Christ.

All men are worshippers, people who centre their lives on something—family, career, environment, entertainment, politics, citizenship, morality, sexual orientation, power, and so on. You might say, “I don't *worship* anything.” But the reality is that there are things that exercise control and influence over our emotions and decisions. Whether we pick one or several things to focus our time, money, and creativity on, those things easily become what we worship. They dictate the everyday decisions of our lives. They control how much money/time/energy we spend, where and how and for what reasons we spend it. The question, then, is not “Am I a worshipper?” but “What do I worship?”

God call us to personal soul-satisfying worship, not devotion to impersonal stuff. He calls us to satisfy our infinite desire for joy and community by delighting in God-centered worship. As God, Jesus calls us to worship God by the Spirit (Jn 4:23), as the way the truth and the life, worship is Jesus-centered. Just as all truth is trinitarian truth, all worship is trinitarian worship which ultimately coheres in Jesus Christ (Jn 1:15; 14:6). As the way (pattern), the truth (reliable purpose) and the life (power) for worshipful living, Jesus demands our delight and praise.

As a result, there is no way to know the triune God apart from Jesus Christ. All things are created, sustained, redeemed and renewed in, through, and for Christ. God in Christ is the beginning, middle and end of the grand Story called life (Col 1:15-20). The biggest lie we have believed is that life is a story about ourselves. Our lives and others lives are part of a much bigger story, the story of God's glory.

Therefore, Jesus Christ is the object of our worship—in song, sermons, community, culture and work. By gathering together regularly to worship Christ in community, we seek to exalt Him for his glory, grace, and goodness, reminding one another of the centrality of Jesus Christ in all things. All things are in, through, and for Jesus Christ.

MISSIONAL COMMUNITY

All peoples and cultures need the Gospel.

There are two dimensions, inner and outer, to missional community. The *inner* dynamic of missional community must precede the outer dynamic. A church cannot be truly missional without the Christ of the gospel. The gospel of Christ is what makes the church different from all other communities, a message that transforms the whole person, communities, cultures, and the world. The gospel reminds us of our ever present need for Jesus and for one another. It tells us that we are far uglier than we ever dare believe, but in Christ more accepted than we could ever imagine. The gospel is sufficient for our failures and the source of our triumphs. **Living and extending the gospel of grace within the community of faith, in forgiveness and perseverance, is critical our joyous task of extending the community through mission.** By sinking our roots deep into the gospel, we will adorn the message we carry to all peoples and cultures. As a missional community we are committed to pursuing the joy of the church and the world through word and deed, cultivating communities of faith and transforming communities of unbelief.

REDEMPTIVE DISCIPLESHIP

All disciples are called to redemptive grace, not rule-keeping legalism.

Redemptive discipleship fosters missional community. If the gospel is the soil of missional community, redemptive discipleship is the plant. It is the inner dynamic of missional community. *Discipleship is the process of redemption in perfecting the whole follower of Christ with the whole message of Christ.* Every disciple grows by sinking their roots deep into the gospel and bearing fruit in every aspect of their life. God does the growing; we do

the bearing. We believe all things are in need of redemption and perfection, but that apart from the work of God it cannot be obtained. God is opposed to earning, but not to effort. Therefore, redemptive discipleship is a project, both individual and communal, that is completed through Christ. We seek redemption and perfection in all aspects of life—personal beliefs and behaviors, family, culture, society, the world.

CULTURE-ENGAGING

All cultures contain and disdain truth, beauty and virtue..

Our aim is to be neither sectarian nor secularist. We do not want to seclude ourselves from or saturate ourselves with the beliefs and behaviors of our culture. Instead, we seek to redemptively and prophetically engage culture, celebrating what is good, considering what is unclear, and rejecting what is bad.

How can we do this? As cultural beings ourselves, how can we pass judgment on the values and practices of our culture? What affords us a unique vantage point from within the culture to redemptively engage the culture? How do we avoid sectarian (culture all bad) and secularist (culture mostly good) divide? The gospel of Christ and the Word of God give us this vantage point. As new creatures in Christ, we have new eyes with which to see our culture. This imperfect vision is in repair, but its source is God's Spirit and infallible Word.

As a result, we peer not from private, self-made towers, but from the earthy pages of holy Scripture. By acknowledging that all truth in any culture is trinitarian truth, truth that is true because accords with the nature and purposes of the triune God, we can affirm what is good and reject what is bad.

But what of the middle ground cultural issues—music, clothing, drink, film? We resist the sectarian impulse to pass laws about how to approach grey areas. Instead, we seek to redemptively engage these fuzzy aspects of cultural life.

THE RATIONALE

Make Disciples · City Ministry · Strategic Value · Theological Distinctives · Missional Potential · Churchplanting Movement

While our vision and strategy are under revision, what follows is a brief sketch of our rationale for planting in Austin, Texas. Because we aim to plant a city church, an urban not suburban church, our location will be in heart of the city of Austin. Austin stands out as a particularly strategic city for kingdom influence for several reasons.

Make Disciples. Unlike most of Texas, Austin is predominately un and de-churched, with 80-85% *not* attending church at all. The percentage of unbelief in the gospel is, no doubt, even higher. Many of the urban churches are mainline denominations that have compromised the gospel of Christ (see below). Therefore, the sheer number of outsiders to the gospel of Christ are reason enough for numerous Christ-centered, missional churchplants. **New disciples.**

City Ministry. Second, to our knowledge there is not a city centre church to serve the needs of the city or to accommodate the rising population of Austin *from an evangelical, church-planting perspective*. Although there are many churches located downtown, many of these churches are not evangelical, but are mainline churches that have aggressively embraced pluralism.⁴ These churches, along with a couple of evangelical churches, however, have collaborated to meet the social needs of the city.⁵ Thus, there is a great need for an evangelical city centre church that seeks the eternal good of Austin. **City Transformation.**

Strategic Value. Third, the strategic kingdom value of planting in Austin cannot be overestimated. Richard Florida has ranked Austin as number two in the top U. S. cities of the Creative class. The Creative class is comprised of high-tech, bohemian-artists, and the educational elite. It is the strongest economic class in the U.S. in comparison to the working and service classes. Austin reflects this description well: high-tech (Motorola, Dell, AMD), bohemian (Austin City Limits, Blanton Museum, 6th Street), and educational elites (University of Texas, etc.) The contributions of this class are not purely economical, but also foster creativity, tolerance, and education wherever they arise. If this class can be reached with the gospel, their cultural and economical capital make them strategic people to redemptively engage the needs of the city, people who can be agents of ethnic, economical and spiritual reconciliation.

However, the societal contributions of the Creative class are not all positive. Although they possess a tolerant attitude, they are rather unconscious of their negative economic and social impact upon the working and service classes, which frequently affects minorities. In general, this class of people is not aware that they are an economic and social class. They are individualistic and merit-driven, which is what makes them succeed in their work. Moreover, their tolerance often only extends to the religious and ethnic elites, those with whom they work, not the minority poor. Due to their indifference and general lack of interest in contributing to social ills, the

⁴ For example, various churches belong to the <http://www.interfaithcarealliance.org/>.

⁵ <http://austin.downtowncluster.com/>

income gap arises around the booming creative centers, making them potential agents of social, ethnic and spiritual reconciliation. **Redemption of Peoples and Cultures.**

Missional Potential. The tolerance and economic potential of the creative class draw immigrants from around the world. From 1990-2000, Austin added 85,907 foreign born people to its population, increasing the previous population by 56%. In addition, there are approximately 115 countries represented at the University of Texas in the 4,500 international students who are enrolled. The nations are flooding this city. The population of Austin is divided between White (70%), Hispanic (30% of any race), Black (7%) and Other (13%) ethnic groups. The international population of Austin is on the rise, making the city a strategic center for missional activity and leadership development for the nations. **World Missions Launchpad.**

Theological Distinctives. Fourth, apart from the Austin Stone Community Church, I am not aware of a Reformed, Missional, Baptist church in Austin with a vision for the city and beyond. Some suburban churches are doing a fine job planting churches in the burbs, but do not have a significant presence in the city. Others are located close to the UT campus with a vision for reaching the student population, but we have not discovered a Reformed city centre church that seeks to promote a Kuyperian vision—the supremacy of Christ over every square inch of society, that seeks the redemption of peoples and cultures through Christ for the glory of God. Thus, the unique confluence of Reformed theology, Baptist sacrament, and Missional identity make another compelling case for this church plant. **Reformed in doctrine. Baptist in sacrament. Missional in nature.**

Churchplanting Movement. With the population of Austin doubling by 2025 to upwards of 1.5 million, there is a rising need for city centre churches that have a commitment to the supremacy of Christ and the social-spiritual needs of the city.

THE STRATEGY

Creative Class in Focus; Transclass in Scope

The challenges in reaching this highly diverse population of 700,000 abound. The city culture is eclectic. Its future uncertain. The housing market is astronomical. The spiritual warfare intense. Nevertheless, our adequacy does not come from ourselves, but from God. Our hope is not in wise and persuasive words, but in demonstration of the power of the whole gospel affecting the whole city. Bottom-line, Jesus Christ died to save the elect of this city and to transform its cultures. And none of God's purposes can be thwarted!

The task is immense. Serious planning and praying are necessary. This brief document only scratches the surface of what I believe God wants to do through this church. We need prayer, a lot of it. To this end, we have developed a network of prayer support that can be notified of urgent needs quickly through the churchplant website and email list. We are asking God to make us a people of extraordinary prayer.

The city is expensive (av. Austin suburban home \$200 vs. av. Austin city home \$350). The City of Austin plans to develop downtown over the next 20 years to multiply housing units, increase retail presence, and establish historical identity of the city in order to keep up with the rapid growth of the suburban areas. A city centre church will, of course, need to begin in the city. So some significant funding is necessary.

The questions are big, but the gospel is bigger. Strategic focus on the CC informs our outreach and missional strategies, sharing and preaching a gospel that is neither moralistic nor legalistic, but cuts to the heart of humanity's need for Christ by dealing with the various issues of these subcultures and addressing key needs (tolerance, truth, quality of life, brokenness, solitude, trust).

To this end, we aim to contextualize, not syncretize, in our mode of church, developing culture sensitive strategies to reach the CC (discussion groups, coffee shops, social outreaches, etc). Lord willing, ACL will grow to several hundred before we plant our first church, perhaps in the bordering minority neighborhoods, reconciling the income inequality and ethnic differences, so often created by the CC. Thus, through earnest trust in the Trinity and loving labor with his people, we aspire to plant an equipping hub church in Austin that would daughter churches throughout the greater Austin area and into other states and nations.

THE MINISTRY PHILOSOPHY

Preaching · Worship · Community · Mission · Leadership

- **Expository Preaching**
 - Rotating biblical preaching that is not “seeker sensitive” or church exclusive, but follows a progression of *text-theology-life*, showing the relevance of the Bible and the gospel to everyone in everyday life. Messages that transform on the spot, not just when you apply them afterwards.

- **Blended, Expressive, Christ-centered Worship**
 - Worship that is God-centered and Christ-exalting can be expressed in various forms. Therefore, as the worship team and musical talent of the church increases, we envision a variety of worship styles ranging from classical to contemporary, Bach to Tomlin.

- **Multi-level, Intergenerational Community**
 - We envision an intergenerational, life-stage sensitive community based on three main structures: Sunday service (corporate, integrated), Community Groups (smaller corporate, integrated) and small groups (life-stage and geographic).

- **Front yard (social/city), Front door (pulpit), and Side door (friendship) outreach**
 - Outreach will express the redemptive power of the gospel through gospel justice (housing ministry), Christ-centered messages that connect with the issues of people and culture (preaching), and relational outreach through workplace and neighborhood mission (conversational mission).

- **Elder-led, People-sensitive, Team-focused Leadership**
 - An elder led church that interfaces with its members regularly through Saturday morning “Elder Coffees” in which there is open dialogue about the trajectory of the church with members. Elders are pastors and pastors are elders, though vocational elders are freed to equip the saints for ministry in a more direct manner. Naturally, there will be a “first among equals” among the elders, which will be held by the visionary/teaching pastor. The pastoral staff will function as a team, while focusing on their respective aspects of ministry.