

# FIRST CITY CHURCH

## CHURCH PLANTING PROSPECTUS



Starting in Fall 2015,  
**Coram Deo Church**  
will begin taking steps to plant  
**FIRST CITY CHURCH**  
in **Bellevue, Nebraska.**

**This prospectus exists to:**

**#1**

*capture the  
vision behind this  
endeavor  
(the WHY)*

**#2**

explain the focus  
of this endeavor  
(the WHAT)

**#3**

answer some of the  
questions surrounding  
this endeavor  
(the HOW)

**#4**

provide some action  
steps for the reader  
(the SO WHAT)

# #1: THE WHY

## **WHY SHOULD CHRISTIANS PLANT CHURCHES? (the gospel/biblical imperative)**

Because Jesus commands us to.

The church exists for the glory of God, the kingdom of God, and the mission of God. “We are not our own; we have been bought with a price” (1 Cor 6:19-20). Because we belong to Jesus, we exist to proclaim his glorious good news far and wide. Jesus commands us to “go into all the world and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you” (Matthew 28:18-20). This Great Commission is a mandate to plant churches. In fact, planting new churches is exactly the way the apostles obeyed the Great Commission.

Church planting was the primary New Testament strategy for extending God’s kingdom and fulfilling His missionary mandate. The book of Acts depicts the spread of a church-planting movement throughout Asia and Europe. Almost all of Paul’s letters were written to new churches either he or someone else he knew had started. William Tinsley writes: “To remove the strategy of church planting from the New Testament would in effect remove all Scripture beyond the Gospels... The Apostles saw the expansion of new churches in the world as the pivotal cog through which the life transforming power of God would be transferred to the world.”



## **WHY SHOULD CORAM DEO PLANT CHURCHES? (the missional imperative)**

Because it’s been part of our mission from the very beginning.

Coram Deo Church exists to *spur gospel renewal in our city and region through making disciples and planting churches*. Church planting is in our DNA. It’s part of why we exist. It’s what we set out to do ten years ago. Over the past decade, by God’s grace, Coram Deo has grown into a thriving local church that is a regional hub for church planting. We have established a culture of strong preaching, rich worship, and effective gospel community groups. We want to reproduce this “gospel DNA” over and over again throughout our city, replicating gospel communities and gospel-centered churches to put the gospel “within arm’s reach” of every resident of Omaha.

## WHY SHOULD CORAM DEO PLANT THIS CHURCH? (the contextual imperative)

Because Bellevue is strategically significant and spiritually in need.

First, Bellevue is **strategically significant**. The city of Bellevue is home to over 50,000 residents, making it the third largest city in Nebraska. Another 500,000 people live within a 20-minute drive. Bellevue (and Sarpy County) is also growing – since the year 2000, Bellevue has grown 21%, with most of that growth coming in the last five years (over that same time period, Omaha has grown only 11.4%). Within Nebraska, Sarpy County is the fastest growing county in the state.

Bellevue is also home to Offutt Air Force Base, one of the largest military communities in the United States. Offutt employs over 10,000 households, and many of those families settle down in Bellevue even after their military careers come to an end. We also have a great opportunity to “export” gospel influence by discipling individuals who will then be sent all over the world by the U.S. government.

Over 40% of the Bellevue community is under the age of 25. These young leaders are the culture-shapers of tomorrow – so we must reach them with the gospel now!

Second, Bellevue is **spiritually in need**. Only 42% of Sarpy County claims any sort of religious affiliation, with only 12% claiming to be “evangelical.” In Bellevue specifically, though there is a general respect for the church, nearly 40,000 of its residents do not regularly attend a religious service. This means that nearly 80% of the population of Bellevue is un-churched or de-churched.

At the same time, Bellevue has shown to be spiritually fruitful! When we first planted Coram Deo Church ten years ago, we launched one gospel community in Bellevue. Over the past ten years, that one GC has multiplied to **seven**. What began with a dozen people has now expanded to over 100 people living on mission and making disciples. Furthermore, in the last 4 years, we have seen 15 new believers from Bellevue baptized. The fruitfulness and missional growth we’ve seen in Bellevue gives us great confirmation that the Spirit of God is at work, and convinces us that the time is right to launch First City Church.

# #2: THE WHAT

## WHAT EXACTLY ARE WE PLANTING?

We are planting an *autonomous, gospel-centered, missional church* that 1) is committed to bringing gospel renewal to the city of Bellevue and surrounding region, and 2) will partner with Coram Deo as part of a citywide network of churches with a shared “gospel DNA” and a shared vision of making disciples and planting gospel-centered churches throughout the Omaha metro area.

*As an autonomous church* – First City Church will be its own incorporated, legal entity, with its own bylaws, elders, and leadership. It will have its own budget, processes, and ministry structures. The elders of Coram Deo will be friends, brothers, and advisors to the elders of First City Church, but the elders of First City Church will have biblical and organizational oversight of their own flock.

*As part of a network* – First City Church will join Coram Deo in a citywide movement to spread “gospel-centered DNA” throughout the Omaha area. As part of the *Coram Deo Network*, First City will reproduce Coram Deo’s own “gospel DNA.” It will share the same mission statement and five core values as Coram Deo. First City will carry into Bellevue a commitment to the same theological convictions, ministry philosophy, and many of the same rhythms as Coram Deo. First City will also partner with Coram Deo by committing financial and leadership resources to the broader work of church planting.

## WHY IS THIS MODEL OF CHURCH-PLANTING BEST FOR OUR CITY?

In our teaching at Coram Deo, we have defined missional church planting as “planting the seed of the gospel in the soil of a city-culture and trusting the sovereignty of God to bring forth a thriving church.” So as we consider local church-planting, we must ask: what is the “soil” of Omaha like? Consider the following four **realities of our context** and their implications for church planting:

Omaha is a **commuter city**:

*People are generally willing to drive to another part of the city for work, school, recreation, and friendship/community.*

### **Implications for church planting:**

- » Affinity matters more than geography: people don’t mind driving to attend a church gathering or a missional community.
- » Lack of defined “neighborhoods” or “boroughs” means churches and church plants will have a more “regional” rather than a “neighborhood” identity.

### Omaha is a **religious city**:

*According to the Association of Religious Data Archives, 40% of the Douglas County population is Catholic or mainline Protestant.*

#### **Implications for church planting:**

- » The front door matters: a good Sunday gathering will be a key part of a church's missional impact in our context.
- » The gospel matters: to be missionally effective, churches must clearly and consistently articulate how the gospel is different from religion.

### Omaha is a **megachurch city**:

*Thirty-six percent of the evangelical population attends a church of 1000 or more.*

#### **Implications for church planting:**

- » The evangelical church in Omaha does not have a "culture of church planting;" we must work to change this.
- » Christians in Omaha are skeptical of "new things," so leveraging the credibility and influence of already-established churches will be crucial.
- » Our mission may attract missionally-minded Christians who are growing stagnant in existing megachurches and who desire to move out into the mission of church-planting.

### Omaha is **not a "destination city:"**

*People who live here tend to be from this area of the country.*

#### **Implications for church planting:**

- » We must grow and reproduce our own leaders (because they're not likely to move here from elsewhere).
- » We must set ordinary leaders up for success. We aren't likely to recruit radically entrepreneurial movement leaders who can start with nothing and build a megachurch.

In light of these contextual realities, we believe the best model for church planting in our city is to plant autonomous local churches that share a broader city-wide affinity. We believe local churches should be led by local elders who care for the church and lead on mission, as Scripture and the Holy Spirit leads them in their particular context. At the same time, a new church plant is strengthened when it carries and reproduces theological convictions and ministry practices that have proven fruitful and effective. Rather than church planters having to start from scratch to create new gospel DNA, they can build off of what has already been established. This "network-model," then, not only allows First City the freedom to contextualize to a local context but also creates a sense of unity and regional identity ("we're a part of something citywide") and leverages the established strengths of Coram Deo. It also furthers a culture of church planting and releases leaders to advance gospel ministry in new areas of the city.



## **WHAT WILL FIRST CITY CHURCH LOOK LIKE?**

Philosophically, it will look like very similar to Coram Deo (you will be able to see the “family resemblance”). It will be committed to gospel-centered preaching, liturgical worship, and the multiplication of gospel communities.

Practically, First City will look like the city of Bellevue. It will take on the “flavor” of that locality. It will be made up of people who live there and who are on mission with Jesus there. While First City will share much of the same ministry philosophy of Coram Deo, its specific practices and ministry structures may look and feel a bit different to reflect the specific context.

To be even more specific:

- First City will have its own preaching pastor – at times First City will preach through its own series and choice of texts, while at other times it will join with Coram Deo to preach through the same series.
- First City will have its own worship leader, and that worship leader will continue to partner with the worship leaders at Coram Deo to grow a gospel-centered worship culture and to write and record music.
- First City’s Sunday worship services will be gospel-centered and liturgical. Like Coram Deo, each Sunday will include musical worship, confession of sin, profession of faith, preaching, prayer, and participation in the Lord’s Supper. At the same time, there may be adaptations to the liturgy that look somewhat different than Coram Deo.
- First City will have its own Children’s Ministry structure. Like Coram Deo, First City’s children’s ministry will be gospel-centered and will work to support parents in the discipleship of their children. At the same time, the specific structure, teaching materials, and activities may look somewhat different than Coram Deo’s.
- First City will have its own gospel communities, and those gospel communities will be evaluated, assessed, trained, and multiplied according to shared network-wide criteria. At the same time, some of the specific week-to-week, month-to-month, year-to-year rhythms and practices of First City’s gospel communities may look different than Coram Deo’s.
- First City Church will raise up local elders to do the work of shepherding the flock in Bellevue; some of those elders will also help to shape and lead to help shape and lead the Coram Deo Network as we seek to plant more churches.
- In addition to being part of the Coram Deo Network, First City will also be a part of the larger Acts 29 Network.

# #3: THE HOW

## WHO WILL LEAD THIS ENDEAVOR?

We believe the Holy Spirit has called and gifted **Chris Hemmelman** to lead First City Church in Bellevue.

Planting a church using this city-network model requires a leader with a church planter's skill-set. He may not be starting something entirely from scratch, but he is still starting something new. Therefore, he must not only be qualified according to 1 Timothy 3 and Titus 1, but he must also be able to preach/teach, lead others on mission, contextualize the gospel, raise up and train leaders, and provide theological and organizational leadership.

We believe that Chris is the right man for the job. In January, Chris and his wife Mindy moved to Omaha from Arlington, Virginia, where Chris had served as an elder at Redeemer Arlington (an Acts 29 sister church). Chris and Mindy began to sense the Holy Spirit directing them to return to the Midwest (where they were both born and raised) and plant a gospel-centered, missional church.

Originally, Chris and Mindy were interested in planting in Des Moines. But the Lord had other plans. As the elders of Coram Deo got to know the Hemmelmans... and as Chris and Mindy got to know the culture and people of Coram Deo... there was a sense of fit and chemistry and camaraderie that seemed to be a work of the Holy Spirit. In March 2015, after Chris had been assessed and approved by Acts 29 as a church planter, Bob Thune and Justin Curtis pulled Chris aside and asked him to pray about planting a new congregation in Bellevue. After spending a season in prayer and processing, Chris and Mindy believe that this is indeed God's calling for them. They are excited to see God bring gospel renewal to Bellevue and beyond.

The Coram Deo elders share this excitement, because Chris brings to the table both gifting and experience. Chris has been assessed and approved by Acts 29. He has earned a theological degree from Reformed Theological Seminary. He and Mindy were part of a successful church-planting endeavor in Arlington. He has a track record of discipling leaders, leading others on mission, and providing organizational leadership. And perhaps most importantly: he's from here. Chris was raised in Dakota City, Nebraska. He understands the culture of the Midwest and can minister the gospel effectively to its idols and issues.

In addition to Chris and Mindy, **Paul and Michelle Gardner** will play a key role in helping to launch First City Church. As the original leaders of the first missional community in Bellevue, they are the *de facto* spiritual leaders among the gospel communities there. Specifically, Paul will serve alongside Chris as an elder



*Chris & Mindy Hemmelman*



*The Gardner Family*



of First City Church, but he will do so bi-vocationally. In October 2015, Paul will return to his work as a physical therapist at Hillcrest. This will strategically place Paul within the community of Bellevue, allowing him to live on mission in the marketplace as well as position him to disciple others to live on mission in the marketplace. Paul's move to Hillcrest will also free up financial resources that can be invested in mission and discipleship in the church.

In addition to the Hemmelmans and Gardners, a number of Coram Deo's deacons and members are Bellevue residents. We envision many of them jumping on board to help launch this new church.

### **WHAT IS THE PLAN FOR GOING FORWARD?**

The following is our current timeline as we move forward with launching First City Church:

- ***June – August: Core Group Recruitment***
  - » Chris and Mindy meet with all Bellevue GCs to develop relationships, cast vision, answer questions, etc.
  - » Core team of 80 committed
  
- ***September – December: Core Group Development***
  - » Hold bimonthly prayer and vision casting meetings in Bellevue
  - » Hold two Core Team "Social Gatherings"
  - » 2016 Budget drafted and approved
  - » Sunday morning meeting space is secured
  - » Worship team, Children's Ministry, set-up/media team, hospitality team volunteers are recruited. Systems and processes are solidified.
  
- ***January – March (2016): Soft Launch***
  - » Launch First City Church Gospel Communities
  - » Core team gathers for weekly Sunday worship service
  
- ***April 3, 2016 – Official Launch date***



## WHAT ABOUT...

### **Meeting Space?**

We'll be praying and working this fall to secure a place in Bellevue to gather on Sundays. We'd ideally like to find an existing church that's willing to let us use their building. If we can't find that, we'll shoot for a school, community center, or other property.

### **Core Team?**

We'll be gathering a core team throughout summer and fall 2015. That core team will be made up of three groups of people:

1. People in the 7 Coram Deo gospel communities in Bellevue
2. Other Coram Deo members and attenders
3. Christians and non-Christians in Bellevue who aren't currently connected to Coram Deo

If you're part of Coram Deo and you live in Bellevue, we want you to pray about joining this core team. At the same time, know that you're free in the gospel *not* to.

### **Gospel Communities?**

In Fall 2015, the seven Coram Deo gospel communities in the Bellevue area will "turn the corner" and become part of the First City Church planting team. If you're currently a part of one of those GC's and **don't** want to be part of this new church, we'll help to transition you into another GC that will remain connected to Coram Deo.

### **Ministry Leadership?**

All First City Church ministries (children's, worship, etc) will be run by volunteers. We will add staff (if necessary) as the ministry grows. First City Church will launch with two elders (Chris Hemmelman and Paul Gardner). The elders of Coram Deo will serve as an "advisory leadership team" until First City raises up and installs 2-3 more local elders who will shepherd and lead the church.

### **What does the name mean?**

As the oldest city in Nebraska, Bellevue is literally the first city in the state. The name *First City Church* reflects our desire to bring gospel renewal to Bellevue and the surrounding region. We are for Bellevue. We want to see the city flourish and thrive because of the gospel. We believe that if Bellevue is impacted by the gospel it will spill over into the larger regions of Sarpy County, Cass County, and parts of Omaha. So our name reflects our commitment to take the gospel to a particular city and region.

# #3: THE "SO WHAT"

Thanks for taking the time to read through this prospectus. At this point, you may be asking: "What can I do to support this effort?" Here are 5 action steps.

- 1. PRAY.** For real. If the Bible is true – and it is – we expect to encounter spiritual opposition in this endeavor. Church planting is kingdom-advancing work, and that puts us on the frontline of spiritual battle. Let's be on our knees together, moving forward in prayer before moving forward in planning.
- 2. PLAN YOUR GIVING.** We want to resource this work well so that it can flourish quickly. Begin now to think about your giving for 2015 and 2016. How can you support this church-planting effort? Where can you give more? How can you trust God for opportunities to invest financially in this exciting kingdom endeavor?
- 3. CONSIDER GOING.** We are hoping to launch this church with a core team of 100-150 committed people. Is God calling you to be a part of it?
- 4. CONSIDER STAYING.** Just as we need people to *step out in faith* and join this new work, we need people to *step up in faith* to fill the gaps this will leave at Coram Deo Omaha. Is God calling you to get more involved?
- 5. TAKE OWNERSHIP.** Planting this Bellevue church is something WE are doing! Whether you are an elder or a new member, a leader or a brand-new Christian, we are in this together. No one is a spectator. No one is on the sidelines. Embrace this vision. Make it your own. Let's dive into this new adventure together, with the Holy Spirit at the helm!

## FOR MORE INFORMATION, CONTACT:

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