

## The Annual National Urban Ministry Conference to be hosted by the National Urban Ministry Association in 2012 forward

A review of the pitfalls of the old model, suggests the need for a new model for hosting the National Urban Ministry Conference. Many successful ministry conferences today are hosted by an organization rather than being hosted by local ministries that change from year to year. These new models suggest that the former model is outdated and should be replaced.

- Organize and Host an annual National Urban Ministry Conference beginning in 2012.
  - The National Urban Ministry Association would serve a similar function as the Mission Resource Network who puts on the Global Missions Conference. The Christian Community Development Association (CCDA) puts on the CCDA Conference annually.
  - The National Urban Ministry Association would partner with local ministries, churches, etc. to host the conference. However, the burden of organizing the National Urban Ministry Conference would not be on a local urban ministry or urban church. Rather, local ministries would be actively involved in planning, assisting, and implementing. The National Urban Ministry Conference would be hosted at the national level by staff.
- Urban Ministry Tracks at University Venues and other Events
  - While the National Urban Ministry Conference needs to be reestablished, there needs to be urban tracks within other conferences and events. Urban leaders need to take an active role in developing meaningful tracks within some of the existing conferences and workshops. For example, urban leaders should be intentional about having strategically placed tracks at the World Missions Workshop, Global Missions Conference, Abilene Summit, Pepperdine Lectureship and other university venues. As part of the National Urban Ministry Association urban leaders would work together with universities to provide meaningful urban ministry tracks

## Pitfalls of the Old Model

- If an urban ministry or local church in a city decided not to host the conference, then it won't occur.
- Depending on the size of the staff of the local city, it places a tremendous burden of organizing, planning, and hosting the conference on a local urban ministry or church.
- The quality of the venue, format, and content were not consistent.
- According to the conference history, "conference had not returned to the goal laid out in the 1994 meeting."
- The conference did not complete the 1994 goal of developing a conference theme around how church planting ministries and support services ministries could work more closely together.
- While there was a well functioning Steering Committee, there was no organization that provided a tangible structure to urban ministry at the national level.
- The focus was on the conference; the National Urban Ministry Conference did not address the needs of urban ministries, churches, workers beyond the conference.
- Depending on the host city, the format, focus, and content looked different. It could be said that the purpose changed from city to city as well.
- The UMC attempted to provide content for both urban workers and members of inner city churches. There was a tension between purposes and so a constant source of concern was do we bring our inner city church members or not?

## Conference Value

A 2005 quote highlights the view from one church planter that the conference was no longer needed, "I've sensed for a few years is that the emphasis on poverty issues, church planting, and urban people groups is moving into the mainstream in our fellowship as well as in other traditions." While that may have been true in 2005, it is certainly not true today. Urban ministry has been gradually moving off the radar of mainstream churches. A clear indication of this is in the amount of funding available for urban ministries by mainstream churches. Another indicator of this movement off the radar is the fact that several ministries have closed in cities around the country.

The National Urban Ministry Conference was the largest annual gathering of urban workers among churches of Christ in the United States. This gave urban workers the opportunity to reconnect and network with urban workers on an annual basis. It also afforded the opportunity for those serving in inner city ministry to collaborate and form partnerships. The value of the National Urban Ministry Conference was highlighted in a 2005 email:

UMC's value is, I am convinced, far beyond what I can see. I'd like to weigh in on this later after discussion here, but I think it's safe to say the fledgling ministry here in Portland would greatly miss the fellowship and learning we see at UMC.

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The value of the conference can be seen in the reasons that people gave for coming to the summit. Below are reasons that people gave for attending the National Urban Ministry Summit:

- Meet people and experience the items on the agenda
- A community of folks that are committed to going to the margins and learning more from one another about how to do this.
- I want to learn ideas and strategies for urban ministry as well as network.
- Learn more about urban ministry.
- To become more educated on how to help the homeless in our area.
- To gain a better knowledge of how to grow our ministry and to establish a connection with other ministries. We hope to learn from others that have been serving over the years.
- Homeless outreach experiences from other churches. New ideas. How to improve relations and trust of the outreach within churches. What is most effective in moving people forward in life.
- Outreach/ organization approaches and ideas
- I attended the Urban Ministry Conference for the first 2 or 3 years when FaithWorks was just beginning. 2002, 2003 and 2004. Being there felt like 'going home' in some weird way.