

**Born to Plant**

**George Bullard, Speaker**

**The Columbia Metro Connection Podcast 017**

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Chris Reinolds: Welcome to the Columbia Metro Connection, a podcast where you can go to get valuable, relevant and quality resources for you and your congregation. The Columbia Metro Connection is sponsored and supported by the Columbia Metro Baptist Association, and the almost 100 family churches that support the ministry of the CMBA. Hosts for this week's episode are George Bullard, the director of missions, strategic leadership coach, and lead Missiologist at the Columbia Metro Baptist Association. And I'm Chris Reinolds, lead pastor at Killian Baptist Church. This week we have a special podcast with George Bullard, highlighting the exciting church planting movement that's taking place here in Columbia, South Carolina. Well, George, first of all, it's good to be back behind the microphone again and it's really hard to believe that it's been a year since we've started this.

George Bullard: Yeah. I'm very pleased and appreciative of you, Chris, and of the process, of us being able to put together these Columbia Connection podcasts. I believe they're really having an impact of being able to tell our family stories around the association and in other places. But over the last 18 months, there's been a great opportunity, shall we say, to say hello to the 95 plus churches we have in the association. In fact, I still haven't made it around to all 95. One of the good things, but also challenging things, is as I begin to talk to churches, they begin to say "Can you come help us with this? Can you come help us with that?" And it slows me down to getting around to every church because if the door's open, I want to walk through the door and help the churches in this particular area. And you know, Chris, during the first year or so, I've tried to focus on strengthening churches, which our one priority is to start and to strengthen churches to become viable and vital and vibrant missional communities, and so I wanted to start first with the strengthening.

Chris Reinolds: Makes sense.

George Bullard: But I'm glad for us to have a chance to talk today about the starting of new congregations.

Chris Reinolds: Right. Right, and now specifically, you're mentioning church planting, and church planting is really becoming a centralized focus for the Columbia Metro Baptist Association, but it's not something that's new to you. It's really something that you were born into, right?

George Bullard: Well, I was actually born into the home of a church planter. The year that I was born, my father left a denominational job to be the new pastor of a new congregation that he and my mother and their Sunday School class had been a part of launching.

Chris Reinolds: Oh, wow.

George Bullard: So in my first six years of my life, we were in a church plant situation, and then my father felt called to a church, this was in Raleigh, North Carolina, and felt called to a church in Baltimore, Maryland. But in the eight and a half years he was there, he led them to plant two churches. Then when I was 15 years old, we moved to Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, where my parents 100% planted new Baptist churches in southeastern Pennsylvania and southern New Jersey.

Chris Reinolds: How many churches did your dad or your parents plant throughout their years of ministry would you say? That may be a number you don't have off the top of your head, but-

George Bullard: Yeah, and part of it is, how many did they directly plant and how many were they facilitating? Because when my parents went to Philadelphia, there were seven southern Baptist congregations in southeastern Pennsylvania and southern New Jersey, and when they left seven years later for my father to be head of the state convention of Pennsylvania and south Jersey, there were 29, so there were 22 additional congregations.

Chris Reinolds: Wow, that's awesome.

George Bullard: But my parents were directly involved in starting two or three of those and facilitated the rest.

Chris Reinolds: That's incredible, though.

George Bullard: Yeah. It really is.

Chris Reinolds: That's a great testimony about how those continue to encourage that from churches after churches after churches. That's great. Now, what year did you really begin helping out? I know that you were a part of it, that you were there, but really helping in the church planting aspect?

George Bullard: This is something I really thank God for. I was able, from the time we moved to Philadelphia when I was 15 years old, to help immediately with the starting of a new church. We started a church that met in the George Washington Motor Lodge at the Willow Grove exit of the Pennsylvania Turnpike, and so when I was a 15-year-old, my Sunday School class was in a motel bedroom, and that was kind of titillating. But having my mother as the teacher took the slightest bit of edge off of it.

Chris Reinolds: I bet. I bet. That would change that a little bit.

George Bullard: But everybody had to do something in the church, and so the worship service was actually in a small conference room where we could squeeze in about 75 people, and we got to where we filled that up within the first year or two. We had this little keyboard, and one Sunday my mother would play it and the next Sunday I would play it, and we'd switch back and forth, and so we all did things. I particularly remember one family that moved in from Oklahoma that were southern Baptist and had four children, and they came the first Sunday and you could hear the husband singing very loudly but greatly. He had a good voice, and they came back on Sunday night, so we knew we had a winner, and so we handed him a hymnal that night and said, "Would you lead music for us starting next Sunday?" And he led music for the next four years.

Chris Reinolds: Wow. That is awesome. That is incredible. So is that part of the key whenever it comes to church planting, is really getting people plugged in and getting people involved, and participating, is to really see that church plant flourish to success?

George Bullard: Well, there's several different ideas about it. I'm thinking about this particular church. We actually had one primary sponsor for this church, which was a church west of Philadelphia, and we had another church that assisted, which was northeast of Philadelphia, and this location was halfway in between the two churches. So they prayed for us, they gave us finances, and they gave us spiritual guidance. But, we had a series of home Bible study fellowships going on, or small groups as we would call them these days, and we had three of those going on, and had developed people who were really spiritually concerned about moving forward with the new church, and then we would get them together on Sunday nights about once or twice a month to have a worship service until we were ready to launch publicly in that motel.

Chris Reinolds: That's great.

George Bullard: And so yes, it's not about just a church planter. It is about building a core group of people who all share the passion of, "We want to plant this new church to reach new people for Jesus Christ, to have an evangelical worship experience, and the disciple making process." Yeah. That’s it.

Chris Reinolds: I like that, that's great. It's not like the single flame, it's about getting all of the kindling to burn to really get the fire going. That's great. That's good stuff.

George Bullard: Absolutely. Yeah.

Chris Reinolds: Now I'm sure, as a kid growing up in a church planter's home and being around this, you sat around the dinner table and you picked up all sorts of lessons along the way. Of the lessons that you learned, which ones do you think would probably be the most encouraging to pastors and church leaders that are listening, that may in fact nudge them in considering to take intentional steps towards church planting?

George Bullard: Well, first of all, Chris, I'd like to say, and I mean this generously. I mean it gently. I mean it carefully. I mean it compassionately, that because I was involved as a teenager and young adult in starting new churches in what was known as a new convention or pioneer area for southern Baptists, and how we had to use a scavenger approach to developing resources, coming back into the South where most of my adult ministry has been, has been a shock to find out how little entrepreneurship and little pioneer spirit there is that exists in the established Bible belt area.

Chris Reinolds: Right.

George Bullard: So I really do have about six things that I would want to say to churches, if I might go ahead and speak to these.

Chris Reinolds: Oh yeah, absolutely.

George Bullard: When we had 50 members meeting for corporate worship, we were ready to start another congregation out of that.

Chris Reinolds: Wow.

George Bullard: And yet I hear in the South, "Well, we’ve got have 200, 250 people and pay off our building before we can sponsor a new church." But I would say you don't have to be a mega-sized church to start another church. You just need a heart for exponential kingdom growth.

Chris Reinolds: Right. Right. What do you think the fear is in that? The fear of starting that small and starting another church from even that small core group of people?

George Bullard: Well, it's just the idea that our church has got to be successful, when the real issue is, no, your church has got to be significant in God's kingdom.

Chris Reinolds: Oh, wow.

George Bullard: And got to be willing to surrender to God's forward leadership, because if all you're worried about is being successful, once you ever reach a point where you're no longer successful, you don't have the depth of significance and surrender to God to lead on.

Chris Reinolds: Wow, that's good.

George Bullard: A second thing I learned is that new churches are exciting, and being part of a church planting experience is one of the best ways to grow spiritually. I think I've actually directly myself planted four churches, not including this one that met in the motel. The first one I started was when I was 19, and I would have to say that I grew better spiritually when I had to deal with the basics of ABC, this is what it's like to have a relationship to Christ, this is what it's like to have a congregation. When you fully understand Acts 2, that everyone has a job to do within the church, and understand the sense of both the huddle and the being scattered, it makes a significant difference.

Chris Reinolds: Right. There's a greater dependency on God in those moments, because it's all a real big risk, and you're needing something stable to hold onto, so it makes sense.

George Bullard: Absolutely. Absolutely. A third thing I learned is that first time guests are worth their weight in gold, and you treat those guests like they are pearls of great value.

Chris Reinolds: Interesting.

George Bullard: Because for each one of them, they are offering themselves to you, and we would assume that in many cases, they didn't just accidentally come to your church, that perhaps God led them to your church that day.

Chris Reinolds: Right.

George Bullard: So how are you going to treat them, and what is going to be your response?

Chris Reinolds: That's good. that's good.

George Bullard: A fourth one is I learned that buildings aren't as important as people think they are. Church is about relationships with God, with one another, and with the context where we're trying to serve. An example that I would give is that in our southern Baptist work, for instance in Boston, Massachusetts, that it got to a point, the first church was started there in about 1958, and it got to the point in the mid- to late-1980s that there were 80 congregations in metropolitan Boston, but there were only 20 church buildings.

Chris Reinolds: Oh, wow.

George Bullard: Because people were willing to adjust their schedule, be flexible, there wasn't anything sacred about 11:00 on Sunday morning, in order to provide space both time-wise and in physical square footage for other congregations to meet.

Chris Reinolds: Wow. That's great.

George Bullard: Fifth, I learned that a church plant requires a core group of people with a Christ-centered faith. But if you don't look for people who need Jesus, you will quickly become a group that focuses inward and becomes closed. You must figure out the culture where you are planting, and dive into that culture, because it's about those people and their relationship with Jesus Christ. And then finally, I'd say, number six, I learned strategies for starting multiple churches. In other words, it's not an arithmetic situation, one plus one plus one. It's a geometric situation, one, three, seven, nine, twelve, twenty. That kind of thing. We must think multiplication, because the number of pre-Christian, lost, unchurched, underchurched, dechurched people is growing faster than the number of churched people.

Chris Reinolds: Hmm. And I'm wondering if part of that really is going back to the, it starts with your initial point that you think that you need a large church in order to start a new church or to have a church plant, and when you get that larger church you become established, and then everything begins to turn more inward, because it's about keeping the ball rolling in the area in which you're currently in versus understanding that we are to be out there multiplying and making more and more disciples, and the way that best happens is from hearing you, it's through church planting.

George Bullard: It's very definitely through church planting, and you think of something even this radical, sometimes a church rather than saying "Let's build that next new building that we want to build," how about using that money to build the first unit building of a new church?

Chris Reinolds: That's good.

George Bullard: Because that new church is much more likely to have a more evangelistic outreach than a church that's more than 20 to 25 years old will ever have.

Chris Reinolds: Right. Right. Now, as it pertains to the Columbia Metro's church planting initiative, why now? There are a great deal of needs that are out there in Columbia. Why go the route of encouraging a church to plant?

George Bullard: Well, first of all, I want to be sure that everybody understands that it's an and/both situation. It's not about shall we plant churches or shall we help existing churches?

Chris Reinolds: Right.

George Bullard: It is and/both. We want every church that's in existence to be on a spiritual strategic journey as led by God, but the issue is that the Columbia Metropolitan area is an area where the population is growing in number. So, it's going to take more than the current existing churches in order to reach people, and so because of the growth and because of the diversification, we have different target groups of people that are continuing to increase in numbers in the Columbia area that are a distance away in terms of socioeconomics or race or ethnicity or language, culture, from our existing churches. We've got to start some new and different kinds of churches, because all of God's people, in terms of creation, need God's redemption.

Chris Reinolds: Right, right. And from our conversation with Ryan Dupree a couple of weeks ago, he shared with us just about the number of diversity that's existing here, even in our area. It's amazing to me. Now, what's unique about Columbia whenever it comes to church planting? What are some things that church planters are going to have to face and consider as they're coming into this environment, or even churches are saying, "We want to start a church planting initiative through our church?"

George Bullard: Well, there are two factors that I would begin with, and one of them, each of them I would say, that it's about the 50,000 factor.

Chris Reinolds: Okay.

George Bullard: We have over 50,000 students in higher education in various educational institutions in the Columbia metropolitan area. Many students who are in a school in a given metropolitan area tend to stay in that area. So, we have a lot of 18 plus year-olds, up to 29 to even 35 year-olds, who are looking and exploring spirituality in a new and different way as they move into their adult life. So, churches among people ages 18 to 29, let's say particularly, that have ministries that effectively focus on the spiritual yearnings of these young adults, and helping them to see that Jesus is indeed the fulfillment of their spiritual yearnings, is very important. That's one of the 50,000s. The other 50,000s is that we have in our area, due to Fort Jackson and some of the services around it, we have over 50,000 individuals who are actively or through retirement related to the U.S. military. So, they have some specialized needs in terms of what they're looking for, and they have some leadership skills that they can provide to churches, but many of them also are spiritual searchers.

Chris Reinolds: Right.

George Bullard: And may have some issues related to involvement in military, particularly involvement in war conflict, that the churches need to reach out to in unique kinds of ways, and not just assume that everybody is the same. Third, our metropolitan area is very diverse racially. Richland County, for example right now is a majority minority, which means that there's no majority racial group in our county.

Chris Reinolds: Okay.

George Bullard: In fact, there's slightly more African-Americans than there are Anglo-Americans, and we may reach a point in the next 10 years when in Richland County we'll be a majority African-American.

Chris Reinolds: Right.

George Bullard: Our association that includes Richland County and Fairfield County and about a fourth of Kershaw County is already a majority minority, and will remain so and become even more robust in the years to come. But a final thing is, and you mentioned Ryan Dupree and then there's another fellow that's working with us in regard to various ethnic groups, and his name is Robby McAllister, is that there are 15 formally organized associations of non-English, non-Anglo ethnic groups from around the world that exist in Columbia.

Chris Reinolds: Wow.

George Bullard: For instance, one example is there are around 5000 Vietnamese that live in the Columbia metropolitan area, and so I'm of a firm conviction that sometimes God brings internationals here. And in our case, there are internationals who have come here and some who have stayed here, there are international students who are here. There are immigrants from various nations around the world who are here, and it's almost like God is daring us not to share the unconditional love of God and Jesus Christ with them.

Chris Reinolds: Right.

George Bullard: So that presents also extremely unique opportunities for starting new congregational expressions among these groups.

Chris Reinolds: And I can see that it would make a huge impact if we began reaching those people groups. Because I would say of the, you said 15 different, there's not a church that is specific for each one of those 15 at this point in time. Is that accurate?

George Bullard: That is accurate. We have about three or four Spanish-speaking congregations in our association. We have a Burmese congregation. We have an Asian Indian congregation, and we have one Korean congregation. There is a Chinese congregation that is looking at affiliation with us, but we've got 10 to 12 other language cultural groups that we have no ministry going with. Some of them are refugees that are being intentionally settled here, and we need to come alongside them and show them Christ-like relationship with them. An example of ministries that are open that are cultivated is that my wife and I in fact attended near Thanksgiving an international banquet at First Baptist Church of Columbia, where there were over 200 people there, and we hosted a table and at our table were three people from mainland China and a person from Ethiopia and a person from Colombia in South America.

Chris Reinolds: That's incredible.

George Bullard: And that was just at our table.

Chris Reinolds: Right.

George Bullard: So the diversity of people who are here that need to understand compassionate Christian love is tremendous.

Chris Reinolds: Right. There's a lot of opportunity for churches that are looking to do church planting to start a new church. Regardless, these are people groups here locally, which they can be a part of. As it pertains to your goals for the CMBA, for the next year, five years, ten years, what does that look like? What is the overall plan as it pertains to church planting?

George Bullard: I like the spiritually complete number of seven, and I was trying to make a list not too long ago of the different kinds of initiatives we need to be taking into starting new congregational expressions. I began to realize that there were about seven different kinds of initiatives and that we probably ought to be doing something in each one of those every year. There are Anglo congregations that might be started with predominantly Anglo cultural observation that need to be started. There are African-American congregations that need to be started. There are multi-ethnic, multi-racial congregations that need to be started. There are non-English, non-Anglo cultural congregations that need to be started. There are house churches or dinner churches that need to be started. There are churches who are barely surviving that need to be allowed for death to happen so that resurrection can happen, and we call that a replant, that might happen in that situation. There are just all kinds of different ones. I haven't named a total of seven, but there were seven on my list.

Chris Reinolds: Yeah.

George Bullard: So I think that we need to be starting seven new congregational expressions. I can think of another one right now, and that is a campus of another church, where they might have satellite campuses.

Chris Reinolds: Okay.

George Bullard: But I think if we could start seven new congregational expressions a year, for the next 10 to 20 years, and thus double the number of congregations we have, we will not have Christianized or churched everyone that needs that in the Columbia Metro associational area, but we would have made a significant inroad, and we would have done our part, as what I would call a five-talent denomination in this area.

Chris Reinolds: Makes sense. It's about ultimately getting the ball further down the field. Our objective is to help expand the kingdom. It's not necessarily to where we're going to get a touchdown. It's to help advance.

George Bullard: Yeah. As a matter of fact, Chris, during 2019, people are going to be hearing a lot about the concept that we're adopting from an organization called Christ Together, and other organizations that use it, called gospel saturation. We're wanting to saturate our associational fellowship area with the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Chris Reinolds: That's good. That's good. Now, if there's any churches that are out there or church leaders that are wanting more information and to find out more details about how they could start a church plant, maybe how they start a new congregation in the midst of their congregation, or maybe they're even looking at making a transition to where they need to hand over their facilities to another church that's looking to do a church plant or looking to expand their church plant, how should they get in contact with you?

George Bullard: I invite them to text or call me directly at 803-622-0923. 803-622-0923, or they can send me an email at georgebullard@columbiametro.org.

Chris Reinolds: All right. Great. Well, thanks so much, and we're excited about what this year holds.

George Bullard: I am too. Thank you, Chris.

Chris Reinolds: And to all of our listeners, thank you for joining with us, and please be sure to check out the show notes for more detailed information about today's show.

Chris Reinolds: Also, if you found this podcast helpful for you and your ministry, share it with others so we can get the word out about what God is doing. Until next time, from all of us at the Columbia Metro Connection, we thank you for listening and urge you to share this podcast with everyone you know. It's the good news about the Good News in the Columbia Metro Baptist Association.