

## **Building a Neutral Entity in the City (ABBA)**

Excerpt from Dan Davis' book, *A Work for a City*

The March For Jesus had shown us that the church in Austin was much bigger and diverse than the sum of our individual congregations. The success of Pastors in Covenant had shown us that pastors from different denominations, movements, and cultures were eager to commit to one another in trusting, enduring friendship. We were entering a new season for the church in Austin.

In 2002, after launching the PIC movement, we saw the need for a neutral entity to facilitate cooperation between churches and ministries in the city. Four of us, Bob Sleet (a former business man), David Dalgleish (currently a home builder in the city), John Berryhill (a church planting consultant), and I, made a trip to Kerrville, Texas, to visit Bill Blackburn who had founded such an entity there called Partners in Ministry<sup>31</sup>. Later, we visited Pittsburgh to meet with Reed Carpenter who has had a long history of bringing church, ministry, and business leaders together in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania and has since founded a nationwide organization called Leadership Foundations of America<sup>32</sup> to reproduce this vision elsewhere. A third very valuable source for us was Jim Herrington of Mission Houston, a pastor-led movement of prayer to bring the churches of that region together.

All of these resources were invaluable to us in forming Austin Bridge Builders Alliance (ABBA) in Austin. Initially Bob Sleet took point in leading this venture. Over the next years, we worked together in various roles to build this organization. We were joined with Ashton Cumberbatch (an attorney who has extensive governmental connections in the city), and Susan McCormick (a local congregational outreach director who had extensive connections with many of the mercy ministries in the city). What followed was a decade of building trusted relationships with the congregations, ministries, business, and governmental leaders in the city.

As ABBA was in its earliest stages, Alan Nagel and I had a chance encounter at a local IHOP restaurant. We stopped briefly (we thought) to catch up a little on what had happened in the intervening years. We were both astonished that our goals and vision were almost identical. Both of us realized that Austin might serve as a prototype for us to link up in partnership. Alan Nagel quickly became part of our team, then an ABBA board member and led us to an alliance with Campus Crusade that was to become very beneficial to both organizations. Alan has since moved into the role as ABBA's Executive Director. This is one of the best examples that I have ever witnessed of a symbiotic relationship between organizations.