Over three days, February 21-23, a unique, sprint-like gathering was held in Orange County, California. The happening was designed to promote discussions and brainstorming concerning pressing needs in our churches.

The Inception

A subcommittee of the Teachers Service Team initiated talks centered on thinking of ways our churches could become unstuck. Robert Carrillo, CEO of HOPE worldwide invited seven individuals to convene in San Diego for the purpose of discussing “the development of a collaboration discussion benefitting our fellowship of churches.” During the discussions, the teachers arrived at an event that they felt would allow people from different backgrounds to meet and talk about a way forward. This event would be titled—Hackathon ’19. The September 6 - 7 2018 meetings included eight individuals: Ed Anton, James Becknell, Jennifer Becknell, Robert Carrillo, Michelle Carrillo, Steve Kinnard, Dave Pocta, and Steve Staten.

Collaborative brainstorming across disciplines has been around for almost a century. It has mostly been used during wartime and in technology and aerospace. In the early 2000s computer specialists would gather to participate in “marathons” and share “hacks” in collaborative software coding. The newly termed “hackathon” soon evolved as a collaboration practice used in engineering and various corporations. The nonprofit sector has found favor with hackathon-styled occasions “that bring together many skilled individuals who donate their time and skills to build something awesome.” Robert had been invited to such an event at the United Nations, and he has used this collaborative approach in HOPE worldwide.

In advance of the first ICOC hackathon planning meeting, the attendees read Andy Fleming’s paper, *Let Each One Be Careful How He Builds*, and other material. During the first evening we discussed two questions:

1. [https://givewp.com/preparing-nonprofit-hackathon/](https://givewp.com/preparing-nonprofit-hackathon/)
What ways are we unique and special?"

Why are we here?"

We came to five decisions.

First, we agreed on the following statement about why we wanted to proceed with a hackathon:

*To provide a supplemental platform to address a variety of symptoms in our family of churches including slow growth, lack of spiritual health, general restlessness, as well as generational, multicultural, and cultural tensions.*

Second, we also decided to tie the event to a teacher’s service team meeting in order to gain from the group’s insight into the program and decide on qualified specialists to speak.

Third, we came up with a descriptor of the event for use on social media. *From time to time it becomes necessary to reexamine some of our long-held assumptions in order to determine which ones serve us well and which ones are increasingly obsolete. The process of retracing the whys of our beliefs and activities can be both harrowing and exhilarating—but nonetheless essential for ongoing renewal. A potentially rewarding practice, called a hackathon, is increasingly used to bring experts and specialists together to tackle organizational issues head on and propose new tested solutions. Join us to engage topics that are often overlooked by the flagships of official conferences and formal communication channels.*

Fourth, we decided to tackle a variety of challenges, rather than just one (which is more typical for hackathons). In doing so, we would address the issues by using subject matter specialists—those who earned the right to speak on a matter through research, education, profession, or significant life experience. The approach of speaking to a variety of challenges would help us identify which needs resonates with potential participants.

And fifth, we decided that we would not push our first “beta” event very hard. Rather than spend significant money and energies on exceptional branding, advertising, printed material, we would do the minimum and focus on substance and become familiar with the format. In this way, we could pass on our lessons learned for the planning of similar events in the future.
Hackathon ‘19
Orange County, California

THURSDAY, FEB. 21—
TED Style Talks:
* Biblical and Social Justice*—Dr. G. Steve Kinnard
* Crossing Cultures*—Tammy Fleming
* The Alaska Story*—Nadon and Morrill
* Reaching Out to Islam*—Moufid Tohme
* The Appeal and Divide of Diversity*—Suzette Lewis
* Dynamic Hierarchy*—Steve Staten

FRIDAY, FEB. 22—
Workshops:
* Gospel Grace*—Dr. Gregg Marutzky
* Church Growth*—Robert Carrillo
a crowd-sourced topic—*Creating a Culture of Humility, Learning and Service*—Shane Engel
* Utilizing Systems Thinking in Churches*—Steve Staten
followed by presentations:
* Passing the Torch*—Raphael Lua
* Be Careful How You Build*—Andy Fleming

SATURDAY, FEB. 23—
Workshop Reports
Closeout Lesson—*Built to Last*—Andy Fleming

The three-day Hackathon ’19 could be described as “positively memorable.” We had over 50 participants. There was a great chemistry in the room. There were people from California (of course), Canada, Alaska, the Middle East, and the eastern US. At the sessions and in a follow-up survey, people commented that a spirit of humility, creativity and willingness to learn was reflected during the presentations and discussions.

Three of the presenters were Canadian—Andy Fleming, Suzette Lewis, and Ray Nadon. They provided noteworthy contributions on timely topics. Steve Kinnard’s presentation on *Biblical and Social Justice* and Andy’s *Build to Last* were strong bookends between Thursday and Saturday. Robert did a great job emceeing and overseeing the event, along with the help of Shane Engel, Chief Communications Officer at HOPE. Terri Loso, National Direct for US Chapters with HOPE, facilitated expertly. And the very thoughtful
Friday and Saturday devotionals were led by evangelists Reese Neyland and Steve Lounsbury.

The TED-Style talks were standalone presentations, whereas the workshops tackled topics through breakout discussions. Each group was tasked to answer questions related to their topic: *What are the problems, challenges, and issues? What are the possible solutions? How can these solutions be implemented? What is your proposal or plan of implementation?*

One group proposed that a paper be written concerning best practices. Another group suggested an ICOC “innovation” task force be formed. There were many other great ideas that surfaced from the discussions.

We quickly realized that there is not a clear mechanism for promoting these types of ideas at this stage in our churches. As a result, one of the ideas was to create a mechanism for getting the best ideas heard, considered, tested, and implemented.

We sought feedback in four categories—“what you liked most,” “what you liked least,” “takeaways,” and “suggestions for future hackathons.”

**Liked Most**

Comments from General Participants

“Tammy Fleming and Suzette Lewis shared passionately about topics regarding culturally diversity and inclusion. These discussions revealed the subtle ways that churches marginalize minorities. They called us to love, care for, and give opportunities to all members, as Jesus did.”

“A collaborative environment unique to any other seminar I have attended - Practical takeaways - Open discussion on sensitive issues - I consider this the best seminar I have been to in over 20 years.”

“I loved the humility, discussions, and problem-solving spirit of the event. Very refreshing and invigorating to get inspired. Would love for this format to be in all our settings. We are taking this back to Palm Springs, and starting by asking our family group leaders ‘Why do people not want to lead small groups here?’ This was a great start to unleashing God’s spirit to help us meet needs and build God’s church.”

“Safe environment to discuss what's not going well and what we can do about it.”
“I liked the interaction and the chance to give our opinion and input. I also liked the short lessons and open questions after each lesson.”

“I enjoyed the highly collaborative approach. It was great to see everyone listening to each other’s ideas (from long-standing church leaders and builders to the ‘Joe disciple’) and engaging in meaningful discussion about important topics. It was a safe place to share concerns and even contradictory ideas. The vibe allowed for constructive debate. There was a good spread of topics. There was a good number of people involved.”

“What I liked most about the ICOC Hackathon was the short and very pointed lessons. It was easier to think about the big issues presented one at a time. It was helpful to have the Q&A discussions following the lessons to process the content.”

“I loved the self-reflection that was demonstrated during this workshop. We looked for cultural weaknesses that this movement has today or has had in the past, and how we could go about slowly changing these cultural issues and convictions.”

“Greg Marutzky’s ‘Gospel Grace’ breakout class on Friday focused on steering a culture to be truly driven by grace rather than condemnation. This class followed with a thorough discussion and came up with a number of ideas of how to implement this cultural shift.”

Comments from Presenters and Planners

“I was very honored to be a part of the program and have left the Hackathon weekend much enriched, with much to think about, and much more to read and learn. Loved the spirit of humility, learning, and grace that characterized the whole weekend. Thank you for arranging a wonderful time of fellowship and learning.”—Tammy Fleming

“My favorite part was the Ted Talks. I loved the format. Next time we might lengthen some of these to 30 minutes or the presentation and 15 minutes for responses. I loved that each presenter was/is an expert in her/his field. From Tammy’s challenge to learn a language to Suzette’s call to equalize the playing field to Steve Staten’s challenge to think about our systems and structures, all the talks left me with something to think about and something to do. I also loved Reese Neyland’s devotional on Friday morning. I think he summed up the weekend for me—stay humble and teachable. I thought the hackathon was incredibly up-lifting and deserving of repetition in our movement to inspire our people to be participatory in all things in our church.”—Steve Kinnard

“What an incredible time shared together over the weekend. The planners did a great job pulling this presentation-rich event together on such little resources ... The best part...the
format of the discussions that encouraged an environment of humble and enthusiastic learning. As was said, the Teachers Service Team (those who presented and those who supported the program) showed up and represented in a big way! It was an honour for Andrew and me to be included in conversations such as these that are so vital for our times. Memorable Indeed.”—Suzette Lewis

Gregg Marutzky provided the most substantial reflection.

*I believe the Hackathon was a huge success! I applaud HOPE worldwide for their investment into administering the event with Shane Engel, Michelle Carrillo, and Terri Loso as model servants. It was well organized and made everyone felt welcome. Great hospitality.*

*I lift up Steve Staten and Robert Carrillo for their leadership and direction. Their gentle hands of guidance and collaboration was inclusive and produced an amazing synergistic environment.*

*I learned from every presentation and felt so much respect for my fellow teachers, (Steve Kinnard, Suzette Lewis, Tammy Fleming, Ed Anton, Steve Staten, Robert Carrillo, Reese Neyland, and Andy Fleming) for their scholarship and responsible instruction. It was obvious to me that in-depth learning will guide us in our way forward as a movement.*

*I loved the spirit due to the mix of ages, experiences, roles, and perspectives of the participants. I appreciated Rafael Lua and Steve Lounsbury's talks as they will influence the future of the LA church and they gave me great hope going forward due to their investments personally in continuing education.*

Andy Fleming "brought the house down" with his keynote messages. Andy's insight and spirituality provided historical data and analysis that is invaluable for our journey ahead. His convictions regarding scripture and shared practices for building up the global body of Christ provides a template for unity and consensus.

*The contingent from Alaska put the Hackathon over the top as we had a visual of a group practicing the principles being discussed. Wow what a good time!*

*Finally, the process of presentation, reflection, group processing, and total inclusion was a model for every retreat and staff meeting. I loved the Hackathon model.*

*The Spirit was present and assisted our learning, God was glorified, Jesus was the focus, and all left with a blessing.*

**Liked Least**

We didn't have as much feedback on this query. A few participants pointed to video projection issues from “projecting on the wall.” And more than one person said, “I wish there could have been more people who attended the Hackathon.” Other comments include:

“Not really addressing how we can communicate this to the broader church. Every disciple should be involved in this.”
“Too many topics in too short time to discuss. For example, reaching out to Islam will need one Hackathon alone.”

“Not sticking to the schedule. We started strong and stuck to allotted times, but then got a bit sloppy toward the end. This is related to what I also liked most: the good spread of topics. Great discussions and topics, but really too much for me personally to really process. A bit of a double-edged sword on that one.”

“I loved the fact that there were many mature disciples at the Hackathon, but would have also loved to see more young faces, both age wise and spiritually.”

Participants Takeaways

About “Biblical and Social Justice” by Dr. G. Steve Kinnard:

“As leaders, we need to be updated on the current social injustices that take place and know where we stand on these issues according to Biblical convictions. When we say nothing, our silence hurts.”

“Silence is often taken to mean implicit agreement with those who are in power ... Acknowledge social events, pray about them.”

“We need to be thinking about how current events are effecting our fellowship.”

About “Reaching out to Islam” by Moufid Tohme: “Learning about the Quran when reaching out to Muslims is key. Our problems seem so small when you realize what the Middle East goes through. Love your enemies and be like Jesus.”

“A lot of Muslims don’t know how many times the Qur’an speaks about Jesus ... Qur’an Facts: Jesus is mentioned 25 times; Mohammad is mentioned only four times. The only woman mentioned in the Qur’an is Mary. The Qur’an teaches so much of the Bible. The English translation of the Qur’an is distorted.”

About “The Appeal & Divide of Diversity” by Suzette Lewis: “Give those who are minorities more opportunities! Be humble and learn from other's cultures and experiences.”

“God’s image is diverse. Diversity without equity is unsustainable, opportunities aren’t always equal for some (consider the holdups, and historical baggage). We have all been equally invited to the banquet (Matthew 22:9). Diversity looks like multiplicity in leadership up front. ... Amplify the voice of the marginalized.”

About “Crossing Cultures” by Tammy Fleming: “Learning a different language helps reach another world of people ... Jesus crossed cultures all the time. This was very inspiring to hear. How is my cross-cultural fitness?”
About “Dynamic Hierarchy” by Steve Staten: “Adopt a systems-thinking model. Systems thinking includes design, health, growth, intra/inter dependence, optimization, adaption, oversight. The pyramid model is sometimes necessary, but not for long term. ... In dynamic hierarchy (like the human body) the authority shifts based on who is determined to have the most knowledge and experience in a specific area.”

“I need to help develop foundations for a dynamic hierarchy system in my local church.”

About “Gospel Grace” by Dr. Gregg Marutsky: “We are redeemed through grace. Deep down people don’t really feel that great. They feel shameful, guilty, regretful, and insecure. We need to let the grace of God heal us. We should strive to emulate the grace of God to ourselves and others, and create a culture driven by God’s grace and love, not condemnation.”

“Become world-class at teaching grace.”

Other takeaways:

“We need practical solutions to transform leadership that future generations will embrace. We must remove the fear of discussing sensitive issues within our churches.”

“We need to do ‘mini-hacks’ (use a similar discussion format for a single topic) in small groups. Develop lessons in my local church regarding ‘progression, not perfection’ and grace. Develop lessons in my local church regarding building a safe culture—imitating the hackathon culture of sharing ideas and speaking the truth in love.

“I encourage people to read Andy Fleming’s Be Careful How You Build paper thoroughly. Also, let’s continue to advocate for getting these topics in front of larger audiences in the ICOC.”

“We need theological inquiry to solve our spiritual issues.”
Suggestions

“We need to find a way to make the global summits more accessible to our brothers and sisters who live outside of the US, or let’s change the name of the event.”

“Let’s find a different venue with better screens and a stage.”

“Get the word out to more people to attend.”

“Make it possible for every disciple to attend and provide input. Separately, I would also like to see something like the ANNUAL State of the Union we have in the U.S. but a State of the Church. As it is now, most disciples don’t really realize how we are doing as a worldwide church and it would promote the unity we so desperately need.”

“Definitely have more around the world, we will start doing them in our region, but let it deal with specific and fewer subjects, this way we can deal with one at a time.”

“We need to include elders in these discussions in order to widen the impact of these ideas and actions.”

“I certainly believe that we need to do more of these, and these discussions need to reach a wider audience. I think that the number of people was key to having the productive conversations that we did. If the number were much bigger, I'm not sure that it would have been as effective.”

Conclusion

The feedback was helpful. All said and done, we found the format was both suitable and attractive. For the most part, we did what we set out to accomplish. We are still reflecting on how to get some of the workshop ideas and takeaways turned into proposals. The next time it might be best to focus on one topic or a few that are closely interrelated.

Report by Steve Staten
Edited by Dr. G. Steve Kinnard
—The Hackathon ’19 Planners