

For I determined to know nothing among you except  
**Jesus Christ, and Him crucified...**

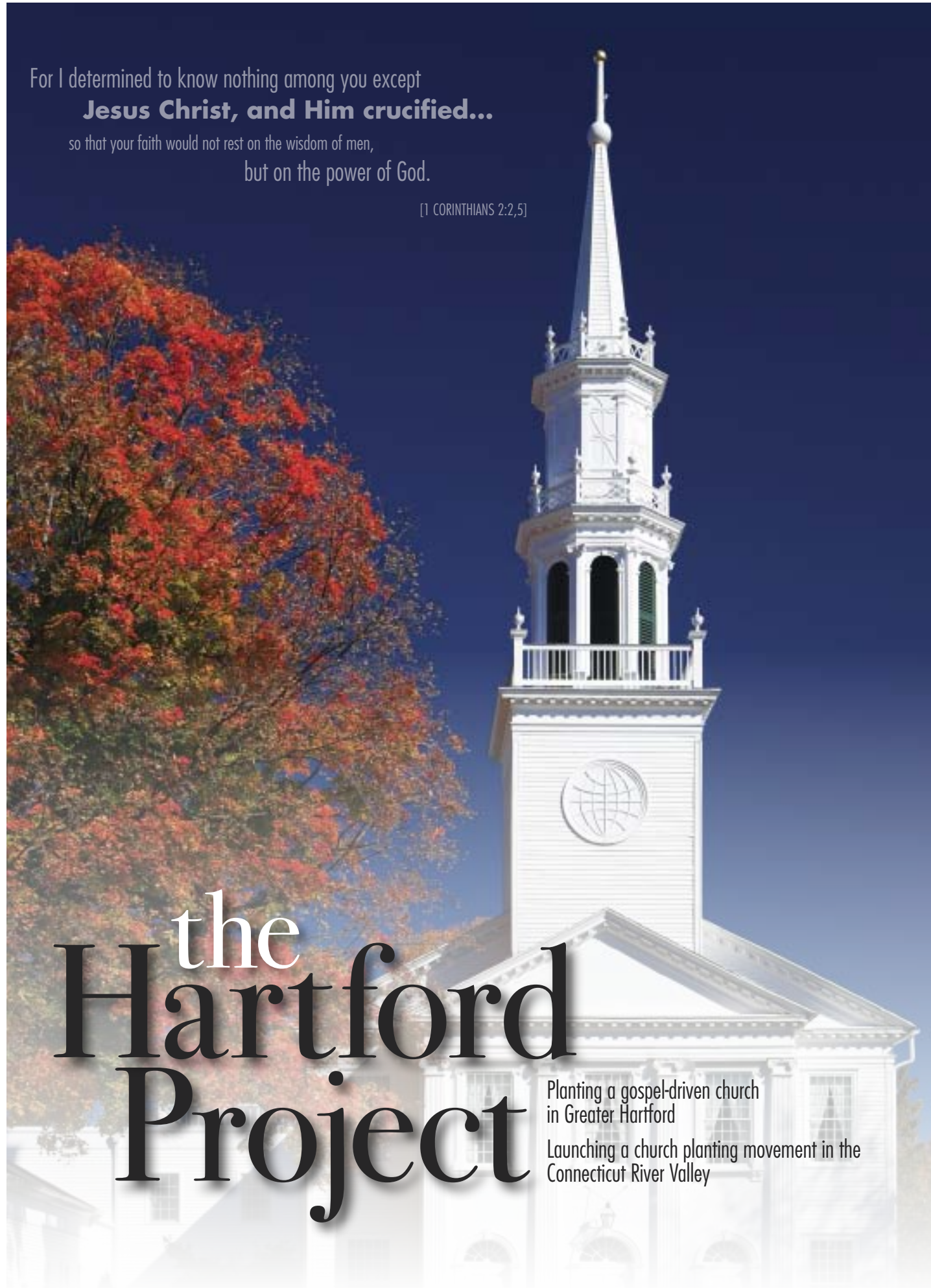
so that your faith would not rest on the wisdom of men,  
but on the power of God.

[1 CORINTHIANS 2:2,5]

# the Hartford Project

Planting a gospel-driven church  
in Greater Hartford

Launching a church planting movement in the  
Connecticut River Valley



# What is The Hartford Project?

The Hartford Project is a strategic gospel mission targeting the Connecticut River Valley. It is the convergence of years of focused preparation and a passion to take the gospel where the gospel is most needed. Church planter Steve Thiel and his young family have put down roots in Greater Hartford to launch a gospel-driven church which, by God's grace, will become the epicenter of a church planting movement in Connecticut. As you read these pages, please consider how you can support The Hartford Project.



# Why Hartford?

## NOW | A Great Need

Education, business and industry are booming in Greater Hartford. New England's second-largest metropolitan area (1.9 million residents) is also its second-largest economic center. Greater Hartford boasts the nation's second-highest concentration of higher-learning institutions, and ranks sixth for per capita income.

The 25-mile stretch between Hartford, Connecticut, and Springfield, Massachusetts, has been dubbed "New England's Knowledge Corridor." But the Knowledge Corridor is ignorant of the gospel. Classic churches built in the 1700s still stand, but the gospel is long gone. Some 50% of residents are either atheist, agnostic, or unaffiliated with an established religion. Roughly 35% are Catholic. About four percent attend an evangelical church; fewer than one percent, a Southern Baptist church.



Local pastors, church planters, and church planting strategists confirm these statistics. They identify the Knowledge Corridor, particularly the town of Enfield, as a strategic target for a church plant.



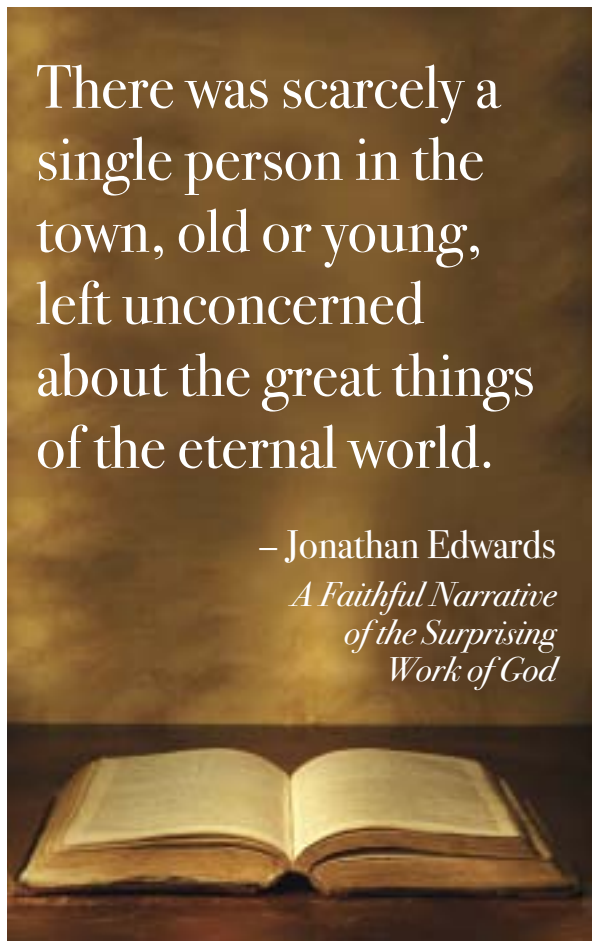
## THEN | A Great Awakening

In 1734, the gospel preaching of Jonathan Edwards sparked revival flames that burned throughout the Connecticut River Valley, from Northampton to Northfield, down through Springfield and Suffield, all the way to Windsor. In six months roughly 300 souls were converted, including "all sorts, sober and vicious, high and low, rich and poor, wise and unwise," young adults, old men, women and children.

Less than a decade later, Edwards famously preached *Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God* at the Enfield Congregational Church. One eyewitness wrote, "Before the sermon was done, there was a great moaning and crying went out through [the] whole House... 'What shall I do to be saved!'"



Historians estimate up to 20% of New England was converted during the Great Awakening – some 25,000-50,000 people!



There was scarcely a single person in the town, old or young, left unconcerned about the great things of the eternal world.

– Jonathan Edwards  
*A Faithful Narrative of the Surprising Work of God*

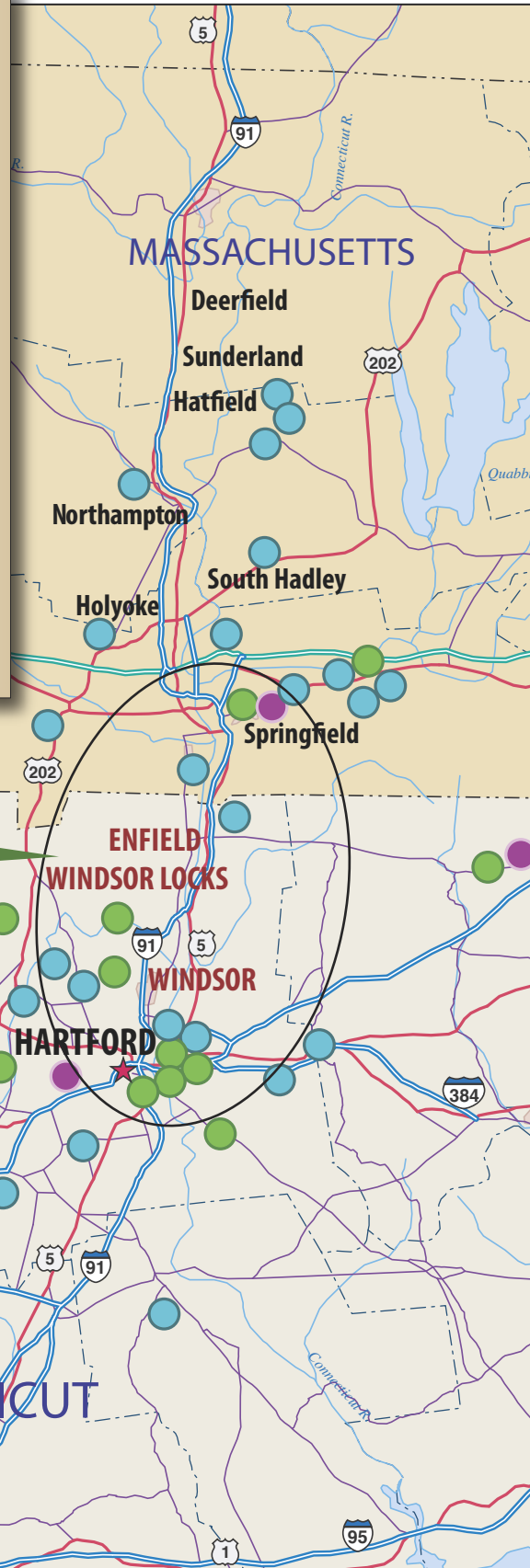
## ... and Again?

We want to see God bless the faithful preaching of His Word so that gospel-driven churches might once again spring up throughout the Connecticut River Valley.



**I**n the month of March [1735], the people of **South-Hadley** begun to be seized with deep concern about the things of religion; which very soon became universal.... About the same time, it began to break forth in the west part of **Suffield**... at **Sunderland**... in **Hatfield**... at **West Springfield**... and in **Enfield**.... This remarkable pouring out of the Spirit of God, which thus extended from one end to the other of this county, was not confined to it, but many places in Connecticut have partaken in the same mercy... [including] **Windsor** [and] **East Windsor**...

— Jonathan Edwards  
*A Faithful Narrative of the Surprising Work of God*



**THE KNOWLEDGE CORRIDOR**

- COLLEGES & UNIVERSITIES INCLUDING UNIVERSITY OF HARTFORD, TRINITY COLLEGE, AND WESTERN NEW ENGLAND UNIVERSITY
- BUSINESS & INDUSTRY INCLUDING AETNA, THE HARTFORD, AND UNITED TECHNOLOGIES
- CHURCHES

**HARTFORD | SPRINGFIELD**

New England's Knowledge Corridor

Hartford

**2<sup>nd</sup>** lowest percentage of evangelicals (the lowest is Salt Lake City)

**3<sup>rd</sup>** least Bible-minded region in the U.S.

**4<sup>th</sup>** least religious city in the nation

Connecticut

**7<sup>th</sup>** lowest percentage of evangelicals

Nearly **twice** the national average of atheists and agnostics



**32** Colleges & Universities

**120,000** Students

**41,000** Businesses (including health care, manufacturing, high-tech and insurance firms)

**5** FORTUNE 500 COMPANIES

**500,000+** COMMUTERS

**over 1.9M** people

**DEMOGRAPHICS**

437,000+ Households

- 70.1% White
- 13.8% Black
- 16.1% Other Races
- 19.1% Hispanic (Any Race)

Median Age: 39.1  
Average Household Income: \$71,049

**Evangelical Church Adherence\* by Metro Area**

\* members or regular attendees

METRO AREA	POPULATION	ADHERENTS	% OF POPULATION
Anderson, SC	187,126	97,855	52.3%
Birmingham, AL	1,128,047	510,091	45.2%
Atlanta, GA	5,268,860	1,375,023	26.1%
Greensboro, NC	723,801	167,940	23.2%
Orlando, FL	2,134,411	380,653	17.8%
<b>Hartford, CT</b>	<b>1,212,381</b>	<b>58,666</b>	<b>4.8%</b>

Data sources: barna.org; Esri 2012; hartfordspringfield.com; Men's Health 2010; moneycnn.com; thearda.com; wikipedia.org.

# Why Us?

## Steve & Linda Thiel

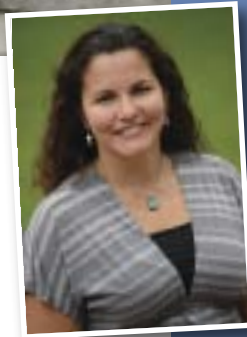
Linda and I came to faith in the spring of 2000 in a New England church plant. We married in November of that same year and now have four young children: Gabriela, Samuel, Juliana, and Jeremiah.

## Church Planting Passion

Since our conversion we have shared a passion for ministering the gospel. We've served alongside one another in varied contexts, from leading downtown Bible studies to youth ministry to launching care groups at our church. In 2004, I was hired as full-time youth pastor at Christ Memorial Church and mentored by Wes Pastor, founder of Christ Memorial and president of **The NETS Institute for Church Planting** (see p.7). I served alongside NETS church planting residents and shared their excitement for starting new works. My passion for souls in New England grew.

## Education & Training

Recognizing the need for formal theological training, I completed my M.Div. at Southern Seminary in 2011. The seminary years also taught me to manage family, ministry and life – throughout the first half, I worked as a youth pastor; the second, a full-time engineer. Upon graduation I returned to Vermont to begin a church planting residency with NETS. Our time at NETS has bolstered our family, faith and skills, preparing us for the rigors of New England church planting. This support and guidance continues as we seek to establish a beachhead for the gospel in Greater Hartford.



*"I'm excited to be serving alongside Steve, caring for our family, hosting Bible studies, and connecting with women and other couples, that the gospel may go forward and Christ's kingdom advance."*  
– Linda

# The NETS Factor



NETS makes a personal, long-term investment in the life of each church and each church planter.

The **NETS Institute for Church Planting** equips men to be successful New England church planters by minimizing the risks of failure.

A recent study of over 40 denominations concluded that proper coaching, mentoring, peer networks and spousal support are critical to church planting success.<sup>1</sup> For wives, emotional, financial and spiritual support are key.<sup>2</sup> The most effective strategy is local churches planting churches, which in turn have church planting DNA ingrained in them.

This is the NETS model. We provide comprehensive training and support for the church planter and his wife. Men in our Residency Program serve as assistant pastors in an established New England church plant. They preach, counsel, lead ministries, and plan mission trips, all while developing a strategic plan for their future church. Planters are mentored in everything from Christ-centered preaching to budgeting to loving their wife and kids. Wives learn to manage marriage, family and ministry roles without becoming overwhelmed.

In the field, pastors receive continued coaching and significant financial support. Each church plant becomes part of the NETS Network, a growing association of churches supporting one another through counsel, shared resources, and committed funds. These are mission-minded churches, motivated to look beyond their own walls from the onset.

Our goal is for every NETS Network church to succeed and reproduce, bearing gospel fruit for generations to come.

## Ministry Experience

- **Assistant Pastor**, Christ Memorial Church (Williston, VT): August 2011 - July 2013
- **Lay Minister**, Clifton Baptist Church (Louisville, KY): August 2008 – July 2011
- **Youth Pastor**, Christ Memorial Church (Williston, VT): February 2004 - July 2008
- **Lay Minister**, Christ Memorial Church (Williston, VT): September 2002 – January 2004



## Church Planting Development

- **Church Planting Residency**, The NETS Institute for Church Planting (Williston, VT): July 2011 - July 2013
- **Church Planting Coursework** (J.D. Payne), The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary (Louisville, KY): Fall 2009 – Spring 2010
- **Southern Baptist Convention Church Planter Assessment** (North American Mission Board): Dec. 2010. *Accepted as church planter.*
- **Converge Worldwide Church Planter Assessment** (Converge Northeast): May 2003. *Recommended seminary.*

## Education

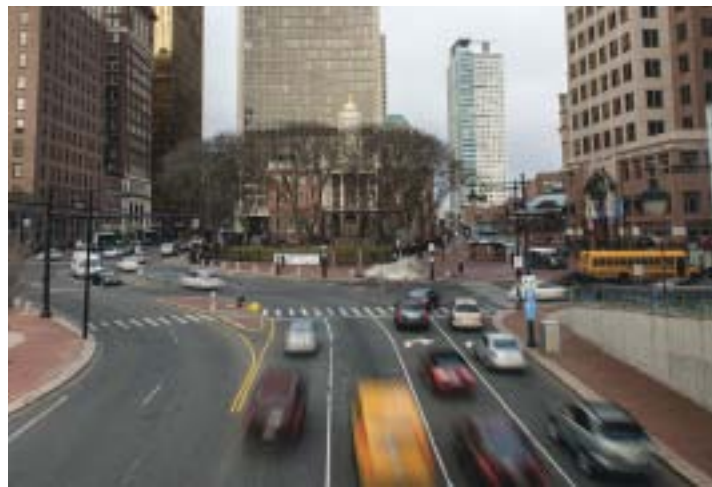
- **M.Div., The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary** (Louisville, KY): May 2011
- **B.S.Ch.E., Washington University** (St. Louis, MO): May 1999

1. Stetzer & Bird, *The State of Church Planting in the United States* 2007. 2. Bailey & Jachelski, *Church Planter Wives Research Project* 2007.

# Our Mission, Values & Vision

For I determined to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ, and Him crucified... so that your faith would not rest on the wisdom of men, but on the power of God.

[1 Corinthians 2:2,5]



## OUR MISSION

To plant a church in Greater Hartford through the proclamation of the gospel, for the salvation of sinners and the building up of the saints, that will become the epicenter of a church planting movement in the Connecticut River Valley.

## OUR CORE VALUES

**The Gospel** – The gospel is God’s good news that Jesus Christ died on the cross, was buried, and was raised on the third day to save undeserving sinners from His eternal judgment in hell. We value the gospel because it alone is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes.

(Rom 1:16, 3:21-26; 1 Cor 15:1-28)

**The Bible** – We value the Bible because it is God’s inspired and inerrant Word, declaring the gospel of Jesus Christ from Genesis to Revelation.

(2 Tim 3:16-17; 2 Pet 1:21; Luke 24:25-32, 44-47)

**The Preached Word** – We value gospel preaching from all of Scripture, since the entire Bible speaks of Christ, for the salvation of sinners and transformation of saints.

(Luke 24:25-32, 44-49; John 5:46; Rom 1:14-17, 10:17; 1 Cor 2:1-5; 1 Pet 1:22-2:3)

**Gospel Proclamation** – We value gospel proclamation by all of our members, in all contexts, to all people, believer and unbeliever, to God’s eternal glory.

(Matt 28:18-20; Rom 1:14-17)

**True Saving Faith** – We value clarity on the nature of saving faith. Sinners are saved by faith in Christ alone, but true saving faith is never alone; it always works itself out in love for Christ and his church.

(Eph 2:8-10; James 2:14-26; Matt 25:31-46; 1 Jn 4:7-11)

**Gospel-Driven Worship** – We value worshipping God in Christ, which is the natural response of the redeemed, the consequence of saving faith.

(Ex 15:1-18; Rev 5:9-10)



**Gospel Community** – We value a gospel-driven community - the church - where blood-bought sinners evidence their love for Jesus Christ by their sacrificial love for one another. Our body life is a tangible and authenticating witness to the world that the gospel is true.

(Jn 13:34-35; Phil 2:3-11; 1 Jn 4:7-11)

**Gospel-Driven Forbearance** – We value forbearance toward one another in all matters neither addressed nor clearly mandated by Scripture (e.g., schooling preferences, family planning, holiday practices, etc.), that the gospel and its proclamation might remain primary.

(Rom 14:1-23; 1 Cor 8-9)

**Godly Leadership** – We value a plurality of godly male leaders whose lives qualify them to shepherd Christ’s church, who will lead with humility, and who will serve as examples of godliness.

(Acts 14:23; 1 Tim 2:12-15, 3:1-7; Titus 1:5-16; 1 Pet 5:1-4; Heb 13:7, 17)

**Gospel-Driven Mission** – We value Christ’s mission to make disciples of all nations, proclaiming the gospel of Jesus Christ promiscuously to every tribe, tongue, people and nation.

(Matt 28:18-20; Acts 1:8; Rev 5:9-10)

**Gospel-Driven Church Planting** – We value church planting as the primary means of fulfilling the Great Commission.

(Acts 13:1-21:14)



# OUR VISION

**We envision** a church that faithfully and relevantly proclaims Jesus Christ and Him crucified from the whole Bible, in all contexts, and to all people.

**We envision** a church that will impact Greater Hartford with the gospel of Jesus Christ as sinners are transformed from rebels into worshippers of God in Christ.

**We envision** a church shepherded by godly men who lay down their lives in Christ-like humility, looking to Jesus, the Chief Shepherd, as our example of sacrificial service to the flock of God.

**We envision** a church with vibrant worship and deep and transparent body life, where people are real with one another and before God.

**We envision** a church in which the gospel of Jesus Christ is displayed before a watching world by our Christ-like love for one another; a love that is sacrificial, bears one another's burdens, considers others as more important than ourselves, and stimulates one another to love and good deeds.

**We envision** a church whose members live intentionally to reach the lost with the gospel of Jesus Christ, who seek to meet needs compassionately but with gospel-driven clarity, knowing that sharing the gospel is the most compassionate deed we can render.

**We envision** a strategic outreach to families, universities and businesses as a means of reaching every generation with the gospel and developing future leaders of the church.

**We envision** a church whose corporate heart beats for Christ's mission to preach the gospel to all nations. We are eager to partner with other gospel-proclaiming missionaries and missions organizations.

**We envision** a church that has church planting in its DNA, strategically launching new church-planting churches throughout the Connecticut River Valley by sending trained and supported men into needy areas.



## THE HARTFORD PROJECT

# Timeline

### Preparation Phase

Summer 2011 - Summer 2013

- Built solid prayer & funding base
- Developed local partnerships
- Completed NETS Residency training

*Moved to Hartford: Summer 2013 (entered NETS Field Program)*

### Recruiting Phase

Fall 2013 - Summer 2014

- Build community relationships
- Start local Bible studies
- Recruit committed core team

### Pre-Launch Phase

Summer 2014 - Launch

- Train core team for launch
- Finalize meeting space & invite broadly
- Hold preview services until ready for launch

*Launch Target: Fall 2014 (contingent on core group development)*

### Stabilization Phase

Launch - Summer 2017

- Gather for Sunday worship services
- Continue recruiting & launch ministries
- Develop leadership

*Ordain First Elders (NETS Field Program ends)*

### Expansion Phase

4-6 Years

- Expand ministries & initiate mission trips
- Break 200-person barrier
- Become self-sustaining church

### Multiplication Phase

For the Life of the Church

- Identify & mentor future church planter
- Finalize location
- Plant daughter church

# Preparation Phase

## Summer 2011 – Summer 2013

- **Built a solid prayer and funding base**
  - Sent monthly prayer updates to 300+ people
  - Secured over \$25,000/year in individual three-year giving commitments
  - Secured support of SBC and Converge Worldwide, including large Converge church in Connecticut
- **Developed local partnerships**
  - Connected with pastors and determined preliminary target area (Windsor, Windsor Locks, Enfield)
  - Secured support and assistance with fundraising from WCBA (Western Connecticut Baptist Association - SBC) and CNE (Converge Northeast)
- **Completed NETS Residency training**

*Moved to Hartford: Summer 2013 (entered NETS Field Program)*

# Recruiting Phase

## Fall 2013 – Summer 2014

- **Build relationships through community events, children's activities, campus connections, neighbors, etc.**
- **Start Bible studies, men's breakfasts, and marriage seminars to meet and evangelize people in the community**
- **Advertise on Christian radio and website**
- **Launch monthly meetings to clarify mission and values**



# Pre-Launch Phase

## Summer 2014 – Launch

- **Finalize meeting space and invite broadly**
- **Identify and confirm core team members (40-50 people)**
- **Train core team for specific roles (greeting, nursery, music, etc.)**
- **Utilize short-term mission teams during media "blitz week" prior to launch**
- **Hold preview services and follow up with visitors until ready to launch**

*Launch Target: Fall 2014 (contingent on core group development)*

# Stabilization Phase

## Launch – Summer 2017



- **Gather for Sunday worship services**
- **Continue recruiting and outreach**
  - Connect intentionally with visitors
  - Organize targeted events
  - Host Bible studies on gospel basics
- **Shepherd the church**
  - Launch small group Bible studies in homes
  - Launch gospel ministries for men, women, children, college, teens
  - Establish relationships with individuals and families in the church
  - Instill a vision for future church planting
- **Develop leadership**
  - Instruct men on basic doctrine and theology
  - Train in basic biblical counseling and servant leadership

*Ordain First Elders (NETS Field Program ends)*

# Expansion Phase

## 4-6 Years

- **Expand small groups and gospel ministries**
- **Organize mission trips**
- **Break 200-person barrier**
- **Become a self-sustaining church**



# Multiplication Phase

## The Life of the Church

- **Work with NETS to identify and mentor future church planter**
- **Challenge congregation to consider joining church planting team**
- **Finalize target location**
- **Plant daughter church**

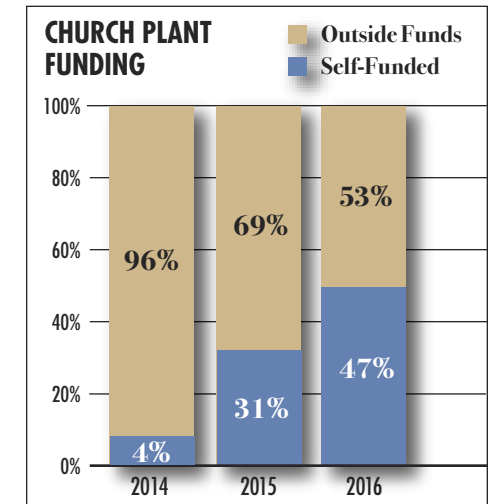


# How Can You Help?

## BECOME A CHURCH MISSION PARTNER

Churches from Kentucky to Florida to Vermont have added The Hartford Project to their mission budget. Mission partners support us financially and in prayer. And while they're blessing us, their churches reap the benefits.

Your church can be part of a mission to the most gospel-parched region of our nation. Praying for a new church excites hearts for the salvation of souls. And mission teams have helped NETS churches canvass neighborhoods, renovate buildings, staff a VBS, and more. But we also need your financial support.



Will you consider a two-to-three year financial commitment to The Hartford Project?

"We need to sacrifice to help this work in New England.

**The future of America depends on the evangelization of America.**

***If we neglect New England, we are neglecting the future of our nation."***

— The Hon. H. Paul Pressler III,  
Texas Court of Appeals Justice (ret.)

"I've been a New England pastor for 18 years, and I'm more convinced than ever of the **need for more gospel-preaching churches** here.

*Valley is excited to partner with Steve Thiel and NETS to help launch this new congregation."*

— Tim Ponzani  
Executive Pastor,  
Valley Community Baptist Church, Avon, CT

Thank you for prayerfully considering an investment in The Hartford Project. We pray God will use it to yield gospel fruit in the salvation of souls and the establishment of church-planting churches throughout the Connecticut River Valley.

For More Information Contact  
**STEVE THIEL**  
sthiel@netsinstitute.org  
860.338.0253

### HARTFORD PROJECT BUDGET PROPOSAL

	2014	2015	2016
Staff (salary and benefits)	\$88,300	\$98,500	\$102,700
Ministry (outreach, worship, missions)	\$7,200	\$16,100	\$19,500
Facilities (rent, equipment, insurance)	\$31,600	\$50,500	\$51,200
Office (utilities and supplies)	\$8,600	\$13,600	\$15,600
Advertising (radio, website, print)	\$18,000	\$16,500	\$16,500
<b>Total</b>	<b>\$153,700</b>	<b>\$195,200</b>	<b>\$205,500</b>
<b>CURRENT FUNDING</b>			
Individuals	\$31,000	\$24,000	\$20,000
Foundations	\$12,000	\$12,000	\$12,000
Denominations	\$15,600	\$15,600	\$3,600
NETS Network Churches	\$7,200	\$12,000	\$14,400
Connecticut Churches	\$17,700	\$17,700	\$12,700
Other Churches	\$9,600	\$21,600	\$21,600
Sunday Offerings (projected)	\$6,000	\$60,000	\$96,000
<b>Total</b>	<b>\$99,100</b>	<b>\$162,900</b>	<b>\$180,300</b>
<b>Current Deficit</b>	<b>(\$54,600)</b>	<b>(\$32,300)</b>	<b>(\$25,200)</b>

### FUNDING STRATEGY

	2014	2015	2016
Individuals	\$8,000	\$4,000	\$2,000
Foundations	\$6,000	\$6,000	\$6,000
Churches	\$40,600	\$22,300	\$17,200
<b>Total Funding Needs</b>	<b>\$54,600</b>	<b>\$32,300</b>	<b>\$25,200</b>





**THE HARTFORD PROJECT**

**Steve Thiel** · [sthiel@netsinstitute.org](mailto:sthiel@netsinstitute.org) · 860.338.0253  
[netsinstitute.org/churches/hartford](http://netsinstitute.org/churches/hartford)