

House Church Networks
A church for a new generation
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Chapter 1
There's a New Church Emerging!

A new species of church is emerging throughout North America.

Hungry for community and relationship, people are learning the values of the kingdom by first-hand participation. They meet in small groups in homes, offices, boardrooms or restaurants. For them church has become a way of life where discipleship and growth occurs naturally as everyone develops their gifts and “learns by doing,” under the mentorship of spiritual fathers and mothers.

Within the next ten to fifteen years, I believe these new *house church networks* will dot the landscape of North America just as they already do in other nations of the world.

They are called *house churches* because each one functions as a little church. They are *networks* because they work together to foster accountability and encouragement.

The New Testament *church* was defined as the *people*. Believers did not *go* to church or *join* the church; they *were* the church. All members functioned as priests because everyone served as ministers. Each person got on-the-job training and learned how to make disciples. These followers of Christ practiced their faith in spiritual families, met in homes and radically changed their world.

The constant need for new wineskins

New wineskins are continually needed to accommodate the believers who do not fit into the current church structures.

It didn't take long to conclude that we must find ways to plant new churches (new wineskins) and begin the process of handing over the reins to the next generation. As Dr. Peter Wagner has said so often, “The single most effective way to evangelize is to plant new churches.”

DAWN (Discipling A Whole Nation) Ministries, a saturation church planting organization, agrees. This kind of church planting infiltration, that envisions a Christ-centered congregation of believers in every neighborhood in every nation, will deeply affect our society.

New house churches networking effectively together in our communities will give the opportunity for thousands of new churches to be planted rapidly all across the nations of the world.

Both young and old want involvement in church life but fail to find their niche

Just like the generations before them, many of today's young people of Generation X, (18-35) year olds), look at the existing wineskins and have no enthusiasm for them. This is what I hear said repeatedly, "I love Jesus. I love my pastor. I am not rebellious, but I just do not feel like I can enthusiastically give myself to my church."

God wants to connect the generations

In addition to a connection with their peers, young people are looking for significant interaction with the older generations. They desire spiritual fathers and mothers who will come alongside them, encourage, and support their dreams and efforts.

The generations must learn to work together. The heart's cry of the older generation must be to release the younger generation to fulfill the Lord's call on their lives.

Dan Yutzy, a church leader and professor from Taylor University told a group of Mennonite bishops that, "We must release these young men and let them go!" He knew the new generation needed to be trusted to start new church structures to accommodate the new Christians coming into the kingdom.

Each generation needs to find its fit

Every generation needs to be free to discover and discern which wineskin is best for them.

A woman recently said to me, "Every week, my home is filled with a twenty-something crowd of young people. They are not the kind of kids that fit in the traditional church. I know they are experiencing church right in my home, but I do not want to be competitive to my church or be misunderstood." They are experiencing dynamic church in a home, but need to be released to really *be* the church.

A new wineskin is emerging: let's not resist it. It may change the way church looks today. Let's open our hearts to the new wineskins God is preparing so the new and the old can work together to advance His kingdom.

Chapter 2 A New Form of Church For a New Generation

House churches should not be confused with *cell churches* currently found in many communities today.

How "cell churches" function

The church was building-bound, clergy-centered, and many Christians longed for a place to belong and be effective witnesses to the gospel. Churches soon realized that small groups (cell groups) could help people rediscover that they could "do the work of

ministry.” Left behind was a spectator mentality of church where the pastor did all the work.

Current cell churches continue to function mainly within the traditional church structure. In other words, although believers meet during the week in homes, in many cases these cell groups still function as complementary ministries to the larger Sunday church meeting. A senior pastor leads this larger gathering and also oversees all the leadership under him in the cell groups.

How “house churches” function

House churches are entirely different. According to my friend Wolfgang Simson in his challenging and cutting-edge book, *Houses that Change the World*, house churches are not mere appendages of the larger church, but real, *bona fide* churches.

[Both] concepts look similar, but are really miles apart, because they build on different values, and a different understanding of church. Where the home group is a small part of the big and “real” church, a “mini-version” of the church, the house church in itself is the church in its fullest and most holistic sense.

Unlike the cell-based church or church with cells, each house church is meant to be a complete little church. Each church is led not by a cell leader and a team of assistant leaders, but by a spiritual father or mother who functions as the elder along with a small eldership team for the little church. He or she does not simply lead a meeting in a house, but rather provides an environment for people to grow spiritually in the context of everyday life.

House churches are simple to start, provide a natural setting for ministry, and are easily replicated.

House churches are a relevant way to engage our communities with the claims of Jesus, according to a successful house church network in Canada.

Like the New Testament church, the house church network focuses on relationships, reaching the lost and raising spiritual fathers and mothers in-house who serve and care for their family.

“Search for the right church ends at home”

House churches network and reproduce rapidly

These are actual churches, not just Bible studies or cell groups. They have elders, they collect tithes and offerings, and the leadership is responsible before the Lord for the souls of the people in the house church (Hebrews 13:17).

Each “house church,” although a little church in itself, is committed to network with other house churches in their city or region. This keeps them from pride, exclusiveness and heresy. This desire to network comes from a similar desire to receive oversight from spiritual fathers and mothers so they stay accountable.

Additionally, these young leaders are intent on the rapid reproduction of these house churches. When they outgrow the house or place where they are meeting, instead of constructing a church building, they plant a new house church. Sounds a bit like the book of Acts, doesn’t it?

We must change the way we “do church”

One of the innovations he, George Barna in his book, *Boiling Point*, suggests for “doing church” is to offer the house church as a structure for restoring community and authenticity to the church:

Popular in other countries, especially Southeast Asia, thousands of independent faith groups will meet for a complete church experience and expression within living rooms and garages...this option will appeal to individuals who are especially interested in restoring authenticity, community and simplicity to the church.

Barna believes the youth culture churches of today will define the church of the future. Consider that:

1. Generation X is the largest single generation in the history of mankind, numbering in the region of a couple billion.
2. With the global media beaming the same message to the same generation worldwide, young people (aged 18-35) are more the same in their thinking today than ever before.
3. As this generation ages and – within the next decade – becomes the prevailing society, they will bring their changes with them. Whatever Generation X has done to the church will be lasting and normative.

“The young people of today, in 10 years or less, will be the society of the nations. That’s why, if we shape new models of church today, we are shaping the church of the future. Youth culture churches may well revolutionize what church becomes in the future.” Wolf Simson.

Not only for the younger generation!

Let me emphasize that although the house church network appeals especially to the young, there are thousands of other “young at heart” people with the same vision burning in their hearts. They are ready to launch out to plant a new church in their home with a vision from the Lord to see it multiply into a network of New Testament-like house churches in their community.

Don’t isolate! Find that connection

House churches, and churches of any kind, should never be exclusive entities cut off from the rest of the body of Christ. The healthy house church will focus on loving the Lord, loving each other, reaching the lost and loving the rest of the body of Christ anywhere and everywhere.

Healthy believers will want to relate closely to the rest of the body of Christ because they want to be “one with the Father and each other.”

Chapter 3 Today’s Community Churches and Mega-Churches

Although I sincerely believe the new house church networks are tailor-made for today's generation and will be a force in returning to the New Testament model of church life, I also believe God is using today's conventional church structures – what I call the community churches and mega-churches – to play their part in God's future plan. God will build His kingdom regardless of our models, structure or plans.

The community church

I love the many unique expressions of the body of Christ. It would be boring if each expression looked exactly the same!

The mega-church

According to the National Association of Evangelicals, there are about 189 churches with more than 3,000 average weekly attendance nationwide. In our nation, every two weeks a new church with 2,000 or more members opens.

DOVE Christian Fellowship's journey from community church to mega-church

People are the church.

We decided to give our church away

When a father gives his daughter to her husband-to-be on their wedding day, he realizes he has invested many years in training his daughter for this very moment – to give her away.

Therefore, that is exactly what we did with our church. Giving our church away better suited our vision of a cell-based church planting movement intent on training a new generation of church planters and leaders. Our church in south central Pennsylvania became eight individual churches, each with its own eldership team. We formed an Apostolic Council to give oversight to all the churches of DCFI. Then we gave each of the eight celebrations the freedom to become autonomous – they had the option of joining with the DCFI family of churches or connecting to another part of the body of Christ. Each of these eight churches affirmed their desire to join DCFI. Churches that we had helped to plant in Kenya, Uganda, and New Zealand also confirmed their desire to be a part of this new international family of churches.

We are currently a network of 85 churches on five continents. Together the network is mobilizing and empowering God's people at the grassroots level to fulfill His purposes. DCFI churches are found in the USA, Kenya, Uganda, New Zealand, Scotland, Canada, Barbados, Croatia and Bulgaria. For a complete history of DCFI, see page 108.

New horizons ahead!

Although my experience has been in the life of Christ expressed through the community church and the mega-church, this experience points to far more possibilities for the church to go about its task of discipling the nations. That is why I am excited about the feasibility of house churches. We need to “keep all options open” so the Lord can use all of His servants to function together as one body to change the world.

It's time to “pray and obey” again

A new day has arrived, again. The Lord has been instructing me and many of my generation to prepare the way for the next generation of church planters and church leaders who will model a new type of church for the next generation.

Chapter 4 New on the Horizon: The House Church Network

Over the past decade, the ranks of families home schooling has grown dramatically, according to *Time Magazine*: “More kids learn at home than attend all the public schools in Alaska, Delaware, Hawaii, Montana, New Hampshire, North Dakota, Rhode Island, South Dakota, Vermont, and Wyoming combined.”

I am not promoting home schooling as the pinnacle of educational experience, but it certainly is a wonderful choice.

I believe within the next several years, house church networks will mushroom all across America. Like our educational choices, they will coexist and network with other more traditional community churches and mega-churches of our communities meeting in church buildings every Sunday. Our God will use and bless all three – the community churches, the mega-churches, and the house church networks.

House church networks

Let's look at a *house church network*.

They are individual and specialized, yet they flourish only when they network together with other house churches.

House churches have a unique mentality

Believers in house churches do not focus on growing larger like the community church or the mega-church. They focus on growth by starting new house churches by multiplication. One way of thinking is not right and the other wrong; they are just different.

I agree with Wolfgang Simson who firmly believes that when we “bring the church to people,” the church will see greater results:

The church is changing back from being a Come-structure to being again a Go-structure. The mission of the church will never be accomplished just by adding to the existing structure; it will take nothing less than a mushrooming of the church through spontaneous multiplication of itself into areas of the population of the world, where Christ is not yet known.

House churches are small; therefore they can meet anywhere – in a house, in a college dorm room, in a coffee shop, in a corporate boardroom. They meet in these locations and do not think of growing larger requiring the construction of a building to accommodate the larger group. Instead, they say, “How can we multiply leaders and start more house churches?” “How can we walk together as house church leaders?”

DAWN Ministries further clarifies this very point:

The house church is a structure that reflects the core nature of the church – that is, an extension of the spirit of the Father in heaven here on earth. It is a spiritual, enlarged, organic family...it is inherently participatory and not consumer-provider driven.

Its responsibility structure is also very simple and effective: individual house churches are fathered by elders, who in turn are equipped by itinerant servants like those in the fivefold ministry (Ephesians 4:11-13). They often relate to a regional spiritual father-figure, who, through his humble apostolic passion and vision, often becomes something like a “pillar of the church,” an anchor-place for a regional movement that fills its cities and villages with the presence of Christ.

Since New Testament times, there has no longer been such a thing as “a house of God.” At the cost of his life, Stephen reminded unequivocally: “God does not live in temples made by human hands.” The church is the people of God. The church, therefore, was and is at home where people are at home: in ordinary houses.

Modern-day house church networks

Mike Steele, who oversees DAWN in North America, has been personally monitoring the growth of house church networks throughout the USA and the world. He told me how he envisions this kind of church affecting every community:

I believe we will see a day when some cities will be “filled with the glory of the Lord as the waters cover the sea!” Division and petty jealousy will be replaced by a sacrificial call to serve the people of the city. Christians will be known for what they have done in humility rather than what they say in condemnation. There will be repentance, reconciliation and restoration in whole sections of the city. Communities will be filled with lighthouses, gatherings of believers who “are” the church and reach out to bless their neighbors and restore their neighborhoods. There will be a rapid multiplication of New Testament communities across this continent. We will see the “church” saturating neighborhoods and communities with the presence of Christ, in word and deed, on a sustained basis.

Many believers in non-western cultures have already caught the focus of the church being about “family.” They are hotbeds for the growth of the kingdom as the church meets in homes.

House churches are springing up in America

Mike believes God is stirring the church in the West, to catch up with the non-western house church networks. He reports that many churches in America are beginning to see the church as a “life-style carried out in relationship in order to mentor, empower and release people for ministry.” Here are just a few examples that he gives:

House church networks are springing up around the country. Some have been going for a long time; others are just being birthed and some are only a few years old. The Foursquare church has a house church planting team in Canada. The Baptists in Texas have a network of five house churches in the Dallas area. Dallas has several folks spreading house churches across the city. There are house church networks emerging in Ames, Iowa, and Billings, Montana. One of my dear friends is currently meeting in four homes that soon will expand to nine. There is

a house church network in Portland, Oregon, for over a decade. There are others meeting in Salem, Oregon. In Austin, Texas, there is a thriving house church network that is linking with house church networks in San Antonio and Dallas. In Houston, one of my good friends has a network of four house churches. They reach into the youth culture. There is a group from the San Francisco Bay area planting house churches in that city and a group of young people in Northern California planting 25 house churches.

“Churches in the home” networking with others in Virginia

My friend Tony Fitzgerald from Richmond, Virginia, oversees Church of the Nations, an apostolic movement with churches scattered throughout the world.

Tony is transitioning to a new wineskin, a house church network in Richmond, Virginia. Tony believes the church needs to meet in the city both in the house and in celebration, relating to apostolic team life connected with the wider body of Christ. They are learning to network together in their city, and they are calling their churches simply “church in the house.”

House church network proposed in Canada

Bob Granholm, from Canada, is currently proposing the establishment of a new house church network in British Columbia.

House church network in Texas

Tony and Felicity Dale are both medical doctors from England who relocated to Austin, Texas, thirteen years ago

House churches in India

In 1993, the Lord challenged Dr. Choudhrie, a well-known surgeon in India, to relinquish his professional career to establish the church in Madra Pradesh.

The Lord is doing the same thing all over the world

House church networks are springing up literally all over the world. They are using much of the same terminology, in spite of the fact they have never met one another. This is truly the hand of God.

A “house church” vs. “organized church” mentality

Not every house church will be a perfect example of a community of people in close-knit, interpersonal relationships. Relational Christianity in house churches can be messy.

If any kind of church (community, mega-church or house) becomes controlling or exclusive in its thinking, it has derailed. We are all a part of the worldwide body of Christ. There is only one church, and we must make every effort to walk in unity. Love always believes the best (1 Corinthians 13:5-6). The Lord will take us in our weakness and bring good out of us if we submit to Him.

Unity must be restored

“They will know we are Christians by our love.”

Jesus knew that the love and unity of His believers sent a compelling message to unbelievers. With this in mind, He prayed for all believers in John 17:20-23:

My prayer is not for them alone. I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message, that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me. I have given them the glory that you gave me, that they may be one as we are one: I in them are you in me. May they be brought to complete unity to let the world know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me.

Jesus does not pray for His followers to “become one,” but rather that they may “be one.” The present subjunctive used here in the Greek designates ongoing action: “continually be one,” a oneness based on their common relationship to the Father and the Son, and on having the same basic attitude toward the world, the Word and the need to reach out to the lost. As believers, we will “be one” if we continue to be in unity with God and each other. Unity breaks down barriers!

Pastors in the same town who never knew one another are now finding each other, praying together regularly, and supporting each other.

The regional church

Unity like this makes room for the regional church to emerge. What is the regional church? I believe it will be comprised of all types of churches – community churches, mega-churches, and house churches in a particular geographical area.

The body of Christ met in house churches within a city, and they were unified by their specific city boundaries: the church of Antioch, the church of Corinth, the church of Jerusalem, the church of Smyrna. However, today, the church has been divided into many different denominations within one geographical area.

Fathers will unify to lead the regional church

I believe there will be an emergence of spiritual leaders from various backgrounds and denominations who will form teams of spiritual leadership to “father” this collective, regional church. These apostolic fathers will serve the church in towns, cities and regions to resource the body of Christ. They will not think only in terms of pastoring a church or churches, but will think and pray in terms of sensing a responsibility with other fellow servant-leaders throughout the body of Christ to pastor their region.

Although these “fathers of the region” will be concerned about unity, it will not be their focus. Their main focus will be on the Lord and on His mandate to reach the lost as the Lord brings in His harvest. Again, the regional church will include all the types of churches in a geographical location – the community churches, the mega-churches, and the house church networks. All denominations and church movements operating in a region have a redemptive purpose to meet the needs of that particular region.

Churches in a region will honor each other

When one studies the revivals found in church history, it is seen that unity among pastors and church leaders in a region is one of the most important prerequisites to revival in a region. Apostolic fathers serving towns, cities, and regions carry the mantle

of unity that brings revival. There are apostolic leaders who serve in leadership over movements, and apostolic leaders who serve in leadership over regions. Some apostolic leaders serve in both areas of leadership.

God is bringing people of various backgrounds and affiliations together in unity. God is using these divine connections to accomplish His purposes.

An example of regional church unity

I see this kind of unity beginning among the churches in our region of Lancaster County, in south central Pennsylvania.

Through prayer and fasting, they have appointed 26 Christian leaders to work together on a council to oversee the Christian leadership community. Council members include Christian leaders from many types of churches, leaders in business, key ministry leaders and even a County Commissioner. Some are members of community churches, others members of mega-churches, while others are members of a new house church network but all are members of the body of Christ in our region.

The regional council has prayerfully chosen seven from among them to consider leading the council as an executive team.

The vision is to “see the church maturing in Christ, strategically serving together to revitalize the church, give a Christ-centered witness to each resident, and bring transformation to the way of life in this region.”

Chapter 5 The Chinese and the Baptists are Leading the Way

China’s house church movement

In January 2001, I had the opportunity to minister to eighty of the key leaders of the underground church movements in China.

Ninety-five percent of these leaders, many of whom had traveled four days by train to get to the secluded leadership training seminar, had been imprisoned for their faith. One elderly leader had just been released four days before.

One precious man of God, who sat at our breakfast table, told us humbly that he gives leadership to 10 million believers meeting in house churches in the house church (network) he oversees. I met a group of women who oversee house church leaders, one of whom was responsible for 400,000 believers involved in a house church network.

I was asked to teach on the biblical truth of becoming spiritual fathers and mothers. After many of the sessions, these humble men and women of God stood, prayed and repented. It was such a humbling experience. They repented because they felt they were so caught up in the work of God, they were not focusing enough on the workers of God. This is a great lesson for all of us to learn. We can become so caught up in God’s work, including the starting of new house churches, that we lose sight of our call from the Lord to be a spiritual father or mother to the next generation.

Chinese vision to send traveling missionaries to start house churches

The Chinese church has a long-reaching vision to train 100,000 missionaries in their own country and send them out to take the Good News of Christ to the millions in spiritual darkness across Asia. The plan is called “Back to Jerusalem” and involves sending the missionaries west on a “mission journey” to several groups as they make their way to Jerusalem.

Churches will be planted along the way as they take three main routes through the “final frontiers of the least evangelized nations in the world.” The first two routes are meant to evangelize mostly through Muslim countries, and the third route will evangelize in the center of the Buddhist and Hindu world.

Future strategy of the Chinese church

The Chinese house church movement has made a commitment to the Lord concerning how the church will exist even when they are freed from communism in the future. They have already made a decision that they will build no buildings. They want to keep their method of training and sending intact, and not focus on constructing buildings but on building people. They seek to accomplish this by (1) not allowing any pastor to stay in one place for a long period of time since this can create a dependency on leadership to do what all believers should be doing – evangelizing and planting new churches; (2) continue their commitment to build and model teamwork; (3) keep a tabernacle rather than a temple mentality. Like the Israelites in the Old Testament, they will move when the cloud moves.

When I asked the Chinese leadership if the people in their house churches tithed, they said “yes.” When I asked them if the house church pastors received support from the tithe, they smiled and informed me that only those individuals who are willing to be sent out as missionaries or apostolic leaders to other parts of China receive any financial support. This is also true of most house church leaders in North America. They either have a business or work at a job to support themselves and their families. They are “tent-makers” like Aquila and Priscilla who had a church in their home (Romans 16:3-5; 1 Corinthians 16:10). Only when they have the responsibility to oversee other house church leaders are leaders supported financially.

The Baptists have uncovered a secret: Church Planting Movements

They developed a Church Planting Movement (CPM) strategy and defined this movement as *a rapid and exponential increase of indigenous churches planting churches within a given people group or population segment.*

Key factors for Church Planting Movement success

The Baptists claim there are several key components to CPM’s. First they reproduce rapidly. Second, there is a multiplicative increase. Multiplicative increase is only possible when new churches are being started by the churches themselves – rather than by professional church planters or missionaries. Third, they are indigenous churches. This means they are generated from within rather than from without.

One of the key elements of these CPM's is the house churches. They say, "The vast majority of the churches continue to be small, reproducible cell churches of 10-30 members meeting in homes or store-fronts."

What about Baptist Church Planting Movements in the West?

David Garrison, speaks out about why he believes we have not seen huge movements in the western world yet: One of the common characteristics that we've seen of church planting movements is persecution. Persecution often creates a climate of urgent need in response to Christ.

There is an awful lot to commend house churches in the United States. There are quantifiable realities, such as the cost of church buildings, the exploding population, the increase in urbanization and the increasing cost of property in the cities. There is no way we can build enough church buildings. It becomes a question of stewardship. Can you justify putting 20-30 million dollars into building a church just so that you can add another 1,000 people to a church that already has a couple of thousand people? When we understand that people make up the church rather than church buildings, more and more people will come to the conclusion that we have to have new wineskins for the body of Christ.

It is in our best interests in North America to think in terms of starting CPM's, not just local house churches. If you have a vision from the Lord to plant a house church, go to your knees until you receive a vision to start or to help start a CPM.

We need a spiritual rabbit plague

Wolfgang Simson says we need a "spiritual rabbit plague." I'm sure you know that elephants and rabbits have vastly different gestation periods and fertility capabilities. Rabbits multiply quickly while elephants produce their young less often. Both a rapid proliferation and slower elephant proliferation is needed to produce the results of carrying the gospel to all the earth.

Cell groups have opened the door for house churches to emerge

I am convinced that the most effective house church networks will be made up of cell-based house churches. Obviously, when a new house church begins, it starts as one cell group. But as it grows, wise house church leaders will train leaders within the group to lead small satellite cell groups as a part of their leadership training for future house church leadership. One house church could be comprised of several small cell groups. In addition to the house church meeting each week, two or three smaller cells of believers would also meet for breakfast or at another time to pray and be accountable with their Christian lives.

Chapter 6 The Next Generation Speaks Out

This is a great church, and I love the leaders and the other staff. But they are too busy. If just one of them gave me only one hour a month to sit down with me for breakfast and her my heart, I would stay. What I really want is a father. I just do not feel I fit in here. Therefore, I am going to leave. I need to find a place I fit. Even though good

things are happening here, it is just not me. I must take a step of faith and find my way. There has to be more.”

Wolfgang Fernandez, director of International Ministries for DAWN Ministries, says we need a new model of church for this young generation: “I think we need a new model, a new shape of church, and a new vision of what church is. This will mean defining a new vision for what we mean by church planting. If church continues to look like a building with a program and a congregational format for all the people...it appears that you are going to have to buy a building or sell one first so that you can bring the people together...this won't work in our youth culture. We need a new model of church in youth culture.”

The four basic values of the next generation

Relationship

Authenticity

Freedom to be creative

Intergenerational connection

The next generation speaks out

Will Stolfus:

As I ponder the question of what the younger generation is looking for in the church, the question itself strikes me. The reality is that there are countless young people who are looking for answers and truth, but many of them are not looking to the church for answers. In fact, many of them actually blame the church for the problems in their lives. While many of their perspectives are skewed by bitterness and disappointment, we must hear what they are saying if we want to reach them with the gospel.

Although I love and support the churches that call on the name of Jesus, I have met many people who don't. These people are both Christians and non-Christians.

Authenticity

It wasn't a matter of being upset at Jesus but the people who represented Him.

Let's empower our young people!

A group of 18 to 35 year olds recently shared with me: “We like our churches and our pastors, but our present churches are not something we want to give our lives for. God is calling us to something new – new kinds of churches. We are not even sure what it will look like, but we want the opportunity to try. We are not rebellious. We want the blessing of the leaders of our churches. We respect and honor them. But we want to build our own house.”

The reality is this: new wineskins eventually get old. I believe God often places a burden in the younger generation to pioneer new churches, but they have a different vision for a different era and a different generation. The younger generations come into the kingdom looking for reality – not religious structures. They want relationships – not

outdated church programs. Let's help them start the new church structures that fit the needs of their generation.

Chapter 7

The Role of Spiritual Fathers and Mothers

A major aspect of house church ministry is preparing and training future spiritual fathers and mothers and then releasing them to reproduce themselves.

With the faithful advice of trusted family and friends it all works out. (author's experience at being a first time father)

When it comes to spiritual parenting, many potential spiritual parents go through the same emotions and fears. "How could God ever use me to be a spiritual parent? What if I can't do it properly? Am I ready for this?" However, as they are encouraged to take a step of faith and obedience, they begin to experience the joy of becoming a spiritual father or mother. They have the satisfaction of training and releasing others for eternity.

Only a dysfunctional parent will try to hang on to his children and use them to fulfill his own vision. Healthy parents expect their children to leave their home to start their own families. Healthy spiritual parents must think the same way. This generation of Christian leaders are called to "give away" many of the believers in their churches to start their own spiritual families – new house churches.

According to the Bible, there are three different types of people in our churches: spiritual children, young men and fathers. 1 John 2:12-13 tells us, "I write to you, dear children, because your sins have been forgiven on account of his name. I write to you, fathers, because you have known him who is from the beginning. I write to you, young men, because you have overcome the evil one..." Let's take a look at these three types of people and how they can be prepared and trained to become spiritual parents.

1. Spiritual children

There are many spiritual babies (new Christians) in the church today, with few spiritual fathers and mothers available to disciple them. Nevertheless, the larger problem seems to be the many "spiritual baby Christians" who never grew up – many of whom are unaware they are still infants. Their spiritual chronological age may be twenty, thirty, forty or fifty years old, but they remain on "the milk." They make a fuss when they don't get their own way, complain about not being fed and have not yet taken spiritual responsibility to train the next generation.

2. Spiritual young men and women

Spiritual young men, according to the Bible, have the Word of God abiding in them and have overcome the wicked one. They have learned to feed on the Word for themselves in order to overcome the devil, but they have not yet become spiritual fathers.

When I was a child, I thought my father knew everything. When I became an adolescent, I felt there were a few things he didn't know. By the time I was in my mid teens, in my youthful arrogance I just figured my father was still living in the stone ages. However, when I became a father, I was amazed at how much my father had learned

during the past few years! In reality, by becoming a father, my perspective changed. In the same way, having spiritual children also changes our perspective.

3. Spiritual fathers and mothers

One of the greatest catalysts to maturity as a Christian is to become a spiritual father or mother. Many of the problems that surface in churches today are the product of: (1) spiritual young men and women who are full of the Word of God but have not had the experience of becoming spiritual parents, and (2) church leaders who have not released and encouraged the spiritual young men and women within their church to have their own spiritual children. House churches solve these training and leadership issues because they develop spiritual fathers and mother in-house in a natural, family-like setting.

Reproducing ourselves

We must think in terms of our spiritual children starting their own house churches in the future. Without raising up spiritual fathers and mother today, we are in danger of losing the next generation. If we do not believe we have the grace to start a church planting movement, then we should ask the Lord to join us to a church planting movement so we can be productive.

The Lord wants to see spiritual families continually reproducing in each generation down through the ages.

The entire Bible was written from a family perspective. It was natural for Paul to think in terms of spiritual posterity because that is how biblical society was set up and the way God intended it to be.

Birthing a spiritual lineage

As believers God wants to birth in us “nations,” too. These “nations” or groups of people, who come to know God because of our influence, will be our spiritual lineage – they are our posterity in God’s kingdom. We have been promised it because we are children of promise. Our God desires to give us a spiritual posterity.

Our inheritance of spiritual children

This promise of spiritual children is for every Christian! God has placed us here on earth because He has called us to become spiritual fathers and mothers in our generation. With this comes the expectation that our spiritual children will have spiritual children and continue to produce more children into infinity.

Our inheritance will be the spiritual children that we can someday present to Jesus Christ.

We, too, need to “believe the Lord” for many spiritual children.

Healthy families will multiply

The Lord wants us to be fruitful and multiply (Genesis 1:28). Our God is a God of multiplication. Multiplication is a fact of nature. As a farm boy, I once counted the kernels on a healthy stalk of corn and found there to be 1,200 kernels in the first generation. Do you know that by the next generation there will be one million, four hundred forty thousand kernels of corn?

In the same way, healthy cells in the body multiply and result in the body growing. A living cell is in a state of constant activity.

As the Lord restores spiritual family life into His kingdom today, the church in our generation will also multiply rapidly. We must properly train and prepare spiritual parent, sons and daughters so that Christ may be formed in them.

A spiritual legacy

A sweeping revival is just around the corner. God's people need to be alert to accommodate the great harvest this will bring into the kingdom of God. Spiritual parents will need to be ready to obey His call and take these young Christians under their wings. God has called us to be spiritual parents. The Lord wants to give us a spiritual legacy. We may not feel ready; in fact, we may feel unprepared. Nevertheless, God's call remains on our lives.

Restoring the New Testament pattern

He is calling us back to be His *family* and return to the New Testament truth of building families.

Many believers are meeting house to house in small groups throughout the world because the Lord is restoring this sense of family to the body of Christ. Christians are again beginning to relive the book of Acts. They are seeing the importance of empowering and parenting the next generation.

I believe we are living in the days of preparation and restoration.

Thirsting for new wine

I believe the Lord is preparing to pour out His Spirit and bring revival to the church in these last days. When the Lord pours out this new wine, we must have the new wineskins (church structures) of the early church were simplistic: people met from house to house. I believe our Lord's strategy to prepare for the harvest is still the same – He wants to use common ordinary believers who have encountered an extraordinary God to meet together as spiritual families from house to house to disciple and train, preparing for the harvest.

God is placing a desire within spiritual fathers and mothers to welcome these believers into the kingdom and then train them as spiritual sons and daughters. The house church is meant to be a spiritual family with the leaders and other spiritual moms and dads in the group taking responsibility to train the spiritual children. House churches develop mature Christians in a family-like setting.

Structure without relationships equals boredom

Plainly stated, *it is not the structure itself that is significant, but the relationships occurring within its perimeters*. If the people in the house churches do not practice spiritual parenting, they can find their groups quickly becoming as boring and as lifeless as any other structure. The life comes from the active father-son and mother-daughter relationships taking place within the house church network.

How do we become spiritual fathers or mothers?

So how does a young man or woman become a spiritual parent? The only way for a young man or woman to become a spiritual parent is to have children, either by adoption (becoming a spiritual father or mother to someone who is already a believer but needs to be disciplined) or by natural birth (becoming a spiritual father or mother to someone you have personally led to Christ) and committing yourself to helping them grow.

A spiritual father defined

Spiritual fathering is a “behind the scenes” task. Being a father is not something we *do*, as much as it is something we *are*. I do not have to tell people that I’m a father. They know it when they see my son and daughters at my side.

Scripture warns us about giving ourselves an impressive title in an effort to try to gain the honor and respect of others. A spiritual father is always a servant first. Spiritual fathers point their spiritual children to their heavenly Father.

Paul, the apostle, called himself a father several times in scripture, but he uses the word “father” to denote, “not *authority*, but *affection*: therefore he calls them not his *obliged*, but his *beloved*, sons.” The measure of greatness of a spiritual father is his level of servanthood and love, not his position.

A spiritual father/mother helps a spiritual son/daughter reach his God-given potential. Bobb Biehl says it this way: “Mentoring is more ‘how can I help you?’ than ‘what should I teach you?’”

There is a tremendous need for spiritual parents in the church today. “Where are the spiritual fathers today?” Jesus took twelve men and became a spiritual father to them for three and a half years. He knew that Christianity was caught not just taught. He ministered to the multitudes, but most of His time was spent with these few men. His disciples changed the world. By our Lord’s example, we can do the same.

You can be a spiritual parent!

You do not need to be perfect, just faithful and obedient.

Are you expecting the believers in your cell group or house church to become spiritual fathers or mothers? If not, you need to change your way of thinking. Many will become future cell leaders, elders, church planters and apostolic leaders as they fulfill their roles as spiritual parents. In the cell groups and house churches, they can experience “on the job training.” In house church networks, cell leaders are called by the Lord to become spiritual parents to believers in cell groups within the house church while elders and pastors become spiritual parents to cell leaders. Apostolic leaders become spiritual parents to elders and pastors who lead house churches. The training occurs by participation and through modeling.

Chapter 8 Let’s Go Back to the Basics

Statistics are dismal concerning the contemporary church. They show the church in America losing its relevance in today’s diverse and pluralistic world.

Churches lose an estimated 2,765,000 people each year to nominalism and secularism. Between 3,500 to 4,000 churches close their doors for the last time each year while 1,100 to 1,500 churches are started each year.

The American church loses 72.11 churches per week or 10.27 per day and gains 24.03 per week or 3.42 per day.

During the last ten years, the combined communicant membership of all Protestant denominations has declined by 9.5% (4,498,242), while the national population has increased by 11% (24,153,000).

“No county in the U.S. has a higher percentage of churched people than it did 10 years ago.”

The USA ranks third behind China and India in the number of unsaved people. While America is the number one nation in sending out missionaries to other countries, we are now second to Brazil in the number of missionaries received. Half of all churches last year did not add one new member through “conversion growth.” Evangelical churches have failed to gain an additional two percent of the American population in the past fifty years. In other words, we are not even reaching our own children.

“Churches that reach the unchurched are highly intentional, and they understand the culture. This is the most unchurched generation in America.”

We really need new wineskins to help revitalize today’s church.

We must get back to the basics of seeing all the saints doing the work of ministry. Ordinary believers must be given the chance to allow God to do extraordinary things through them.

The book of Acts church was radical!

How could the 120 disciples in the upper room possibly have taken care of 3,000 new believers? Part of their secret is found in Acts 2:46-47 (NKJ):

So continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from **house to house**, they ate their food with gladness and simplicity of heart, praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to the church daily those who were being saved.

God’s people met in small groups in homes: “They devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer” (Acts 2:42). They began to minister to one another and to the unsaved on an individual basis, and the Lord kept adding to the church daily! In Acts 20:20, the apostle Paul declares to members of the church at Ephesus that, “You know that I have not hesitated to preach anything that would be helpful to you but have taught you publicly and from house to house.”

Temple ministry is beneficial for corporate worship, teaching and celebration, but the Lord wants us to get back to seeing the church as *people*, not as a place where people meet. Our homes, places of business, schools, and other circles of contact provide

excellent places for the church to meet as we infiltrate our spheres of influence with the gospel of Jesus Christ.

What was the early church really like?

Don't you think it's time to get back to basics and allow God to build His church through New Testament discipling relationships? It's not too late.

The primary focus of meeting in homes

The primary focus of each house church should be outreach and discipleship, rather than fellowship. Great fellowship will be a healthy by-product of the house church that is consistently reaching out to others.

There will be much prayer and interaction within the group to meet needs and form relationships, but the top priority must always be to bring in the lost. This will cause the house church to mature and reproduce another house church. It will give more believers the opportunity to use the gifts the Lord has given to them to reach the lost and make disciples.

When house churches become content to stay the same, without knowing it, they build walls around themselves causing others to feel unwelcome. The group that has a heart to reach out will be willing to change, and will enjoy meaningful fellowship in the process.

The main purpose for every house church must be to rescue people from the brink of hell.

The primary vision must be clear and fixed – we are called to fulfill the Great Commission.

When individuals in house churches challenge each other to reach beyond themselves to make disciples, they will discover that God will give them many creative opportunities.

New churches provide more opportunities for evangelism

Fuller Theological Seminary found in a study that if a church is ten or more years old, it takes 85 people to lead one person to Christ. If the church is 4-7 years old, it takes seven people to lead one to Christ. If a church is less than 3 years old, it takes only three people to lead one to Christ.

Age of church	people/salvation ratio
10 years + old	85:1
4-7 years old	7:1
3 years & under	3:1

Let's plant new churches in homes all over our communities. "Save the World, Plant a Church."

A group of new house churches in Keswick, Ontario, is made up of almost all new believers. These new believers bring their friends to the house church meetings. They just love hanging out and talking about life and how the Bible applies to their lives.

In restricted areas, churches can meet in homes

In the book *House to House*, I tell the story of a church in Ethiopia that was forced "underground." In 1982, half of all the evangelical churches in Ethiopia were closed due to harassment.

The church membership at that time was approximately 5,000. After the churches were opened again the most startling news discovered was the church had grown "underground" from 5,000 to over 50,000 people!

God's agenda for the building of His kingdom includes two elements – laborers and harvest.

Learning from history – the Methodist revival

John Wesley, the founder of the Methodist church, saw that new wine must be put into new wineskins. He started "class meetings" to disciple the new believers being saved during the Methodist revival.

The classes were in effect house churches. The class leaders (men and women) were disciplers.

Not only did Wesley reach the masses; he made leaders of thousands of them.

Downsizing in order to grow

Community churches, mega-churches and house churches in a region would do well to work together to utilize all their resources more fully. Why not "downsize" by sharing resources? I believe we will discover myriads of ways that churches, like corporations, can "rid themselves of unessential costs and liabilities."

I look forward to the day when we can be so flexible that we will allow church buildings in our communities to be utilized every day of the week. Many community churches and mega-churches currently use their buildings for a few choice meetings and the church facility remains unused the rest of the week.

Chapter 9 Just Keep it Simple

Psychologist Larry Crabb, in his book *Connecting*, astutely remarks:

Maybe the center of Christian community is connecting the a few, where ordinary Christians, whose lives regularly intersect, will accomplish most of the good that we now depend on professionals provide.

House churches are real churches

We should again make the distinction between a cell church and house church. They are not the same!

First, the cell-based community or mega-churches usually have their own headquarters with an administrative structure. As a cell-based structure, they encourage the real spiritual life to happen in small groups, usually in a home, but it tends to be more meeting-centered with the need for a lot of administration. House churches require no headquarters; they are much more flexible and fluid because they meet solely in homes or other places (coffee shops, offices, etc.) and do not require another building for further church programs.

House churches are very different because they are self-contained churches in themselves. Each house church has elders (with one of the leaders assuming the primary leadership role of the group) who serve as fathers and mothers with a heart's cry to train and reproduce more leadership within the house church. This kind of fatherly and motherly leader gently nurtures individuals until they are ready to take a step of faith to become leaders themselves.

As we mentioned before, a house church may include several smaller "cell groups" within the house church. These satellite groups often meet at times other than the regular house church meeting time. Smaller groups within the house church often help to foster deeper relationships and greater accountability as people become involved in a lifestyle of everyday community. The house church models a way of life. It takes place entirely outside the mentality of religious meetings. Church *is* the people living their lives in an extended spiritual family as they focus on reaching the lost. Although families require some organization, it is a relational organization, minus any bureaucracy.

House churches will network

There should be a natural desire for house churches to network with other house churches for encouragement and accountability.

Some house church networks are small, with only a half dozen or so house churches involved in the network. Others are much larger, with teams of apostolic leaders providing encouragement, oversight, and spiritual protection.

House churches that are not open to becoming a part of a house church network usually become stagnant and focus inward, rather than looking out to the harvest. Although there have been believers involved in house churches for many years throughout America, I do not recommend looking to all of them as a healthy resource.

Working together – community churches, mega-churches, house churches

Some community churches and mega-churches will commission leaders to start house churches and give them the oversight needed to help them grow. Other community churches and mega-churches will "adopt" house churches in their communities and help them network together. The fundamental idea is that our Lord's kingdom is being built and expanded in a particular region.

I believe there will be freedom in the coming days in the hearts of God's people to serve wherever God has called them.

“The times, they are a-changing!”

During the industrial age, adults usually kept the same job their entire lives. But in today’s information age, studies show that the average person will make at least five career changes during the course of a lifetime. Today’s society is a mobile one forcing us to be flexible. This same principle applies in church life.

Each kind of church has its strengths and weaknesses as it endeavors to empower people for ministry. Flexibility is key.

House churches need leadership

“Do house churches and house church networks need leadership?” The answer is “yes.” Servant leadership. Fatherly leadership.

When a house church says they have no need for leadership, the person voicing this the loudest is often the real leader who just does not want to admit it!

According to Hebrews 13:17, we need to obey and submit to leaders who “keep watch over us.” They bring spiritual protection to our lives. We cannot try to blot out this truth from the Bible because unfaithful spiritual leaders have abused it.

True apostolic leaders will faithfully serve house churches

I have friends who lived on the South Island of New Zealand who experienced a move of God in their house church. Within a few months, literally dozens of people came to faith in Christ and became a part of their house church. The leaders of the house church saw the need for proper connection in the body of Christ and for spiritual oversight. Watchman Nee once said, “We do not have authority unless we are under authority.”

Paul warns us against false apostles who are not fathers but have a personal agenda. A house church should be sure to take its time in finding true apostolic spiritual oversight.

What about children in house churches?

The Lord values children. They can take an active role in house church life because they are part of the spiritual family in the home.

Children participating in house churches have the privilege of seeing the Holy Spirit deal and work in real life situations as families meet together as the church.

Children are needed to humble us with their questions, break up our endless “adult” discussions, bring us down to earth from our pious clouds, and act as natural evangelists and bridge-builders. They also help us to prove the fruits of the Spirit – patience, for example – and will serve as heaven-sent spies to spot instantly any trace in us of religious superstition and hypocrisy.”

Creativity and flexibility are the keys to providing fellowship for kids who want a real walk with God. We have found the book *Biblical Foundations for Children* to be helpful to minister to children in a setting where they have their own special time together.

Pitfalls to avoid in house churches

Pride

A common pitfall to avoid in house churches and house church networks is pride. If those of us who are called to house church networks take a superior attitude, the Bible tells us we will fall. House church networks are only one of the many things the Lord is doing in the world today. We should never have an exclusive attitude.

Fear

We have to learn to move in faith, and not in fear.

Independent spirit

Sometimes those who do not want to come under any type of spiritual authority will gravitate towards house church ministry because they believe they can do their own thing without having to answer to anyone. This kind of independent spirit is a form of pride and will destroy us.

Heresy

House churches may fall into the trap of heresy if they are exclusive and unwilling to work with others. We all need accountability to keep us from heresy.

What if I am not called to a house church?

Please guard your heart so you do not persecute the next move of God.

Over the course of history, new moves of God have often persecuted the next wave of God's Spirit.

The church of today is a diverse one, and diversity is healthy. God is working through program-designed churches, cell-based churches, community churches, mega-churches and through house church networks.

So how should those of us called to serve with community churches and mega-churches respond to house church networks that emerge in our community? Let's welcome them, reach out to them and offer them help to succeed. Many of these house church networks may ask to rent our church buildings each month for their monthly celebrations. This would be a win-win situation for both parties!

Let's allow the house church networks to grow up alongside the community churches and the mega-churches in our communities. We need to see ourselves as a part of the regional church the Lord is raising up in these times.

The Charismatic church didn't replace the denominational churches of their day, but grew up right alongside the more traditional churches. Those who call on the name of Jesus are everywhere and in every Christian church. Christ has set us free, and we are free indeed (John 8:36)!

What a healthy house church is not

First of all, a healthy house church is not people who are disgruntled with the community or mega-church. Second, a house church is not an ingrown club of people who have forgotten the harvest. Third, it is not Christians who are independent and

unwilling to submit to the recognized leaders within the body of Christ because they do not believe in spiritual authority. Fourth, house church networks are not groups of people who have been together for a number of years and have only slightly grown in size or not at all. And finally, healthy house church networks are not groups of people who are stagnant and sterilized by the reasons I have given above.

Which model of church is most biblical?

God will use whichever structure He chooses.

Pride always comes before a fall.

What the regional church is and is not

The regional church has a far-reaching mandate from the Lord. Its goal is to see Christ proclaimed to every person within the community and to see the entire region transformed by the power of God. The regional church is intended to be a kingdom connection of relationships.

Although it is possible for the local ministerium and the regional church to be one and the same, most often it is not. Why? Because the local ministerium tend to be more bureaucratic while the regional church's intent is to be relational.

Chapter 10 The Time is Now!

If you build it, they will come!

Rick Joyner:

A revolution is coming to Christianity that will eclipse the Reformation in the sweeping changes that it brings to the church. When it comes, the present structure and organization of the church will cease to exist, and the way that the world defines Christianity will be radically changed.

What is coming will not be a change of doctrine, but a change in basic church life. The changes that are coming will be so profound that it will be hard to relate the present form of church structure and government to what is coming. The new dynamic of church life will overshadow the Great Awakenings in their social impact, transforming cities and even whole nations. It will bring a sweeping sense of righteousness and justice to the whole earth.

The future leaders of the church are now being given a vision of radical New Testament Christianity being restored to the earth. It is time to heed the call and allow the Lord to lead His people to the new wineskins that will be able to hold what is about to break out upon the earth. Whenever there is a choice to make between the new and the old, choose the new. To be a part of what is coming, we must have the faith of Abraham who was willing to leave the security of the known to seek God in unknown places. The future leaders of the church will be willing to risk all to seek the city that God is building, not man.

A new model for a new time

Many future pastors are sitting on church pews today, finding no room for their gifts to be released in their present structures. We must allow a radical kind of Christianity that becomes a life force to break out and motivate our future leaders to action. House church networks enable the priesthood of all believers, and require no expensive church buildings. Every believer will begin to realize his or her part to play in discipling the nations. As a result, house churches meeting in every community will cover our nation within the next few years.

Multiplying people is not that hard to do. A group should continually speak the vision of growth and multiplication and the fact that healthy families have the expectation that their children will eventually grow up and start their own families. A good leader will focus his or her time and energy in training faithful, potential leaders.

Why are many future spiritual leaders seated in church pews every Sunday or even attending a small group unaware that they could be leading a church? They are inactive because the only models they have ever seen are the community church model and the mega-church model.

The house church network gives us a new model. It puts everyone on a more even playing field. I believe there are thousands of future house church pastors who will have faith to lead 20-40 believers in a house church as a spiritual father or mother, but they would never want to lead 100+ people and attempt to maintain the many programs and ministries, in addition to a building project, that a traditional church structure often requires.

We need many more churches

We do not need fewer churches in our communities: we need more! The house church model gives many more believers the opportunity to start new churches. I believe there are thousands of former pastors and Christian leaders who are no longer involved in church leadership because they have retired or are now working in the marketplace, unaware that they could be starting a brand new church in their home, giving the opportunity for more people to be exposed to the gospel. Churches in homes, led by humble spiritual moms and dads, are not only a wave of the future; they are the need of the future!

Young leaders with a vision

The leaders of the Lancaster group have designed a vision for the new house church network they are starting. It states:

The vision for this house church network is to create new, flexible wineskins that will be a leadership training ground for rapid reproduction of leaders of small, relational, evangelistic churches. These new churches could meet in homes, campuses, places of business, malls, coffee shops, barns, skate parks, and other places where people naturally meet.

Spiritual parents will be trained to mentor new believers, new small group leaders, new church leaders and new apostolic leaders. These new churches could meet on

any day or night of the week and would network together by the direction of the Holy Spirit.

Working together

We are adding special training to our current leadership training school for house church planters. “If we want all three types of church to coexist, we will need to be proactive in training for all three.”

The fivefold minister’s role in house churches

One of the secrets to John Wesley’s Methodist house churches and exponential kingdom growth were the circuit riders. These fivefold ministers were the spiritual specialists who traveled from house church to house church. God is raising modern-day fivefold ministers in His church today: “It was he who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers, to prepare God’s people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up” (Ephesians 4:11-12).

Fivefold apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers are ministers who circulate within the house churches to train and equip leaders.

Fivefold ministers are spiritual fathers and mothers called to train the next generation in their specific gifts and calling.

Experienced fivefold fathers will recognize his gift and mentor him.

Our view is that many of these “fivefold” ministry gifts are for trans-local ministry, not to be used solely in one cell group, house church, or congregation as seen in Acts 15:22, 30-32, 35.

Apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, teachers help the church come to maturity

Apostles are given to the church to help us receive a vision from the Lord to reach the world. Prophets are given to train us to listen to the voice of God. Evangelists are called of God to stir and train us to reach the lost. Pastors are commissioned by the Lord to encourage and show us how to make disciples! And teachers have a divine anointing to assist us in understanding the Word of God. Most fivefold ministers also have a “gift mix.”

The church, which is going to grow, is the church that makes sure they are receiving a regular impartation from each of these ministry gifts while realizing that only Jesus has all of the gifts.

House church networks and missions

Traditionally, western missionaries have had a tendency to export the only type of wineskin they have experienced – the community church or the mega-church. Missionaries who are sent out of house church networks already have experienced basic Christian community and New Testament church life from house to house. They will not need to unlearn much of what they may have experienced in order to effectively minister the gospel in unreached areas of the world. Since house church networks follow the simple pattern in the book of Acts, they can work in any nation or culture.

Release flexible containers!

Floyd McClung made a statement to his small group leaders that I will never forget: “There are young leaders among us who will be planting new churches from our church. Many may be house churches, and some of them may not even be a part of our church. Maybe they will join up with another movement, but either way, we must get behind them and help them.” We must take this posture as the Lord prompts the next generation to plant new house churches and house church networks right in our own backyards. These house churches are needed to contain, nurture, and equip the harvest that is ready to be reaped in our communities and in the nations.

Mike Bickle has often shared that God had revealed to him that “God is going to change the forms and expressions of church within one generation to a great degree.” Recently he expressed that “the house church network is a vital ingredient in that change.”

He has promised to pour out His Spirit in these last days, but this will necessitate flexible containers to hold the great harvest that is on the horizon. Is it possible that the Lord is waiting for His church to prepare the proper containers so He can fully pour out His Spirit?

Forming new vessels will facilitate the Lord’s commission to make disciples.

Appendix Two What is DOVE Christian Fellowship International?

We made our share of mistakes

We found the Lord’s purpose for cell groups was to release and empower His people, not to control them.

Transition

The vision the Lord had given us, “to build a relationship with Jesus, with one another, and reach the world from house to house, city to city and nation to nation,” could not be fulfilled under our current church structure.

Becoming an apostolic movement

Unlike an “association of churches,” which gives ordination and general accountability to church leaders, we see an “apostolic movement” as a family of churches with a common focus – a mandate from God to labor together to plant and establish churches throughout the world.

Partnering together

The DCFI family is from nations in four continents of the world. There are churches in the United States, Kenya, Uganda, New Zealand, Scotland, Croatia, Bulgaria, Canada, and Barbados.

Networking with the body of Christ

God has given us a wonderful support team at DCFI consisting of the Apostolic Council, a team of Fivefold Translocal Ministers, a Stewardship Council which handles

the administration of financial details and legalities, and various ministries who are committed to resource the leadership and believers in DCFI partner churches and serve the greater body of Christ

The International Apostolic Council and leadership from DCFI partner churches throughout the world meet together each March for our annual DCFI International Leadership Conference at a conference center on the east coast of the USA for the purpose of mutual encouragement, leadership training, relationship building, and to receive a common vision from the Lord. We believe the Lord has called us to work as a team together – *with a shared vision, shared values, a shared procedure, and to build together by relationship.*

Training and releasing God's people

Brian Sauder gives oversight to the *House to House Church Planting and Leadership School.*

DCFI missions outreaches

We are called to build the kingdom, not just our own network of churches.

House churches as true churches

The monthly celebration is not the church. The house churches are true churches, not just Bible studies or cell groups. They have elders, they collect tithes and offerings, and the leadership is responsible before the Lord for the souls of the people in the house church (Hebrews 13:17).

House church networks – a wave of the future

Looking unto Jesus, the Lord of the harvest

Like our early beginnings, we are again sensing that the harvest is upon us.

We are committed to empowering, releasing, and supporting the next generation among us as they fulfill their call in God.