

## **Relational-Based/Residence-Based Churches:**

*A Kingdom Model of Church Planting and Multiplication for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*

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“They devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. Everyone was filled with awe, and many wonders and miraculous signs were done by the apostles. All the believers were together and had everything in common. Selling their possessions and goods, they gave to anyone as he had need. Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved” (Acts 2:42-47 NIV).

The passages above speak of a wonderfully simple yet intensely committed gathering of Disciples, enjoying the presence of God and expressing Christ through their lives and relationships. As the Gospel spread throughout the Roman Empire during the 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> centuries, Believers gathered in homes to worship the Lord Jesus through the church life. As described in the book of Acts, these gatherings, or assemblies, of Christians were flexible in structure, aggressive in evangelism, accountable to each other through intimate relationships, and continually multiplying both disciples and local churches as Believers would move from place to place.

As we rapidly approach the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, a model for church starting and multiplication resembling the New Testament Church has emerged, especially in the urban centers of the world where “evangelical equity” is not very high. In these areas, Believers are gathering churches in their homes, networking with other residence-based churches of like vision, doctrine, and practice, and multiplying throughout neighborhoods and communities as their churches grow and leadership is raised up. These residence-based church networks are reaching unchurched people groups through natural relationships, intentional evangelism and planned outreach gatherings, using the smaller, more intimate home setting to do ministry in the midst of people who would not go into a program/building based congregation.

### **Mission**

Before a discussion on the planting of Relational-Based/Residence-Based churches can occur, I believe it is best to discuss the “why’s”. If we begin to understand why it is important to start new churches which are relational in nature and purpose, the “how to’s” of starting these churches will fall into place. On the day of His ascension, Jesus stated very plainly: “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age (Matt 28:18-20 NIV).” The command Jesus gave to his disciples was to “make disciples” as they were going. They were to reproduce themselves through the course of their lives. Yet this activity was to be a lifestyle of the Disciples and not a program; it was to be their daily practice. Christ was to be their life individually and corporately, and their commission was to be the expression of Christ on the earth. “But you will receive power when the Holy

Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth (Acts 1:8 NIV).”

So it is Today that we, as followers and disciples of the Lord Jesus Christ, should be His expression and representation on the earth in everything we do and everywhere we go. If this was not the case, then there would be no purpose for the promise stated in Acts 1:8. The power given by the coming of the Holy Spirit is for expressing Christ to those around us, for joyful living as His victorious Body (the church) on this earth, and for increasing His Body through the reproduction of ourselves lived out in practical experience in the local church.

### **Definition & Characteristics**

The Relational- based/residence-based Church (hereafter referred to as “House Church”) is an expression of Christ being lived out among His People, the Church. It is the starting point, the nucleus, of a community of churches which has as its end the enjoyment of the Father and the expression of the Lord Jesus Christ. Autonomous yet interdependent upon other local churches to whom they choose to walk with in relationship, the House Church does not stand alone but is a vital part of a network of local churches who minister together in a given locality or demographic region..

The House Church is the result of prayer, not program. It is birthed out of praying Believers calling upon the Lord of the Harvest to send out workers into His harvest field (Luke 10:2). The Church becomes a reality when those Believers, who are sent out by God join Him in His harvest field, covenant together to be His people, His Body, His work in the place where they live, work and interface. Again, the goal is for a local church to be birthed which will, in turn, birth other local churches. The goal is not to increase attendance or to start a Sunday School class in an existing church. Although church growth and development are vitally important to the work of the Church, the very nature and purpose of the House Church is to multiply into new churches. Some basic characteristics of the House Church include the following:

#### **1. Flexible in Structure**

The House Church allows for the ebb and flow of relationships and for the equipping of lay leaders without undue strain experienced by program driven churches on budget, building, and body. Because the Church meets in homes and is led by teams instead of staff, changes in relationships caused by such things as job transfers or natural attrition can be dealt with without overtaxing the congregation and causing headaches for those in leadership. The natural training and discipleship focus should lead to the reproduction of leadership on an on-going basis allowing for greater flexibility within the church.

#### **2. Aggressive in Evangelism**

The House Church is built on relationships and is focused on reaching out through the networks of relationships each member has in the community, workplace, and family. If the House Church

does not have evangelism as a passion, the group will degenerate quickly into a Bible study at best and will eventually dissolve.

### **3. Accountable Relationships**

The House Church provides “no place to hide” and no “back pew” for those who are seeking to remain hidden in the body. Through the building of healthy relationships which function in Spirit and in Truth, each one has the opportunity to be built up into mature followers of Jesus (Eph. 4:11-16).

### **4. Continual Multiplication**

Each House Church should have in it’s very reason for being the hope and reality of reproducing itself through the reproduction of new believers and the reproduction of new churches. In everything the church does, furthering the Kingdom through the expression and glorification of Christ should be it’s goal.

#### **Process**

As the Holy Spirit is preparing a local church to reproduce itself, it will become evident that certain Believers in that gathering are earnestly praying for people in their network of relationships (i.e., relatives, friends, neighbors, work associates, etc.). Church Planting Teams should be raised up out of these praying people by the Pastor, Minister of Missions, Church Planting Catalysts, etc. The Church Planting Teams must display the characteristics of faithfulness, availability, integrity, and have hearts which are both serving and teachable. It is best if the teams consist of Believers who work in the marketplace and are supervised, resourced and trained by those who have their time freed up for ministry. This creates an indigenous atmosphere for the new work and creates a situation of fast delegation of responsibility in the work due to time constraints of the Church Planting Team members.

In following a Biblical model for church planting, the Team members must first prayerfully identify a Person of Peace (Luke 10:5-7) from out of their networks of relationships. The Person of Peace is one whom the Holy Spirit will use to open doors to the gospel, following the networks of relationships he or she functions in. The Team will work with the Person of Peace to begin gathering unsaved and/or unchurched people together for the purpose of starting an outreach focused Bible Study.

A series of non-threatening, neutral gatherings should take place before an evangelistic outreach meeting is attempted. Gatherings such as progressive dinners, golf outings, picnics, game nights, etc. can be used to build rapport and trust among the people the Team (and designated prayer partners from the mother church) are praying for. Once a sense of trust is developed, the team, now including the Person of Peace, can issue invitations to an evangelistic gathering meeting. The nature of these meetings should allow unsaved and unchurched people to explore the possibilities of coming into vital relationships with Christ and with other Christians. As these people become Followers of Jesus, movement can be made to transition the gathering meeting into a Home Bible Fellowship with the intent of this group of new Believers experiencing

Baptism and then covenanting together to be a local church. It is during the Home Bible Fellowship stage that new leaders are raised up to lead the group and the Church Planting Team takes on more of a resourcing and developmental role, working with the mother church to assist in the formation of a new church. From the beginning of the new congregation, the reality and nature is to multiply: to not only reproduce new Believers, but also to reproduce new churches. It is out of the single cell of a House Church that disciples are raised up, men and women are called out into church planting teams and new churches are started.

### **The Nature of a Residence-Based Church**

1. Natural Mentoring Relationships resulting in the reproduction and multiplication of Leadership.
2. Natural Evangelistic Environment through the building of witnessing relationships in the community.
3. Natural Multiplication Systems through the network of leadership and churches resulting in church planting teams being raised up from within local churches and new churches being birthed from the wombs of mother churches.
4. Natural Association with Other Local Churches resulting in autonomous yet interdependent local churches, sharing resources, leadership, training, outreach endeavors.
5. Natural Efficiency and Effectiveness in the area of finances resulting in almost every dollar going to missions/outreach/church planting projects due to very low overhead (no paid staff or permanent facility maintenance).
6. Natural Growth and Participation resulting in the maturing and multiplication of Disciples and churches.

### **Purpose**

As stated earlier, the purpose of the Church is to enjoy the Father and to express Christ through the power of the Holy Spirit. Through the starting of new churches which will in turn start new churches,

The Scripture is clear: “Devote yourselves to prayer, being watchful and thankful”(Col. 4:2 NIV). All efforts to “Start Something New” must be guided by this mandate. Only the works of God will stand for eternity. It is in these works that we as His servants must join Him. It is through praying with our eyes open that we will see Christ at work all around us in the lives of people who desperately need His forgiveness and Life. O Lord, send out workers into Your harvest fields!

### **References to Residence-Based Churches in the Bible**

Acts 2:46; 4:31; 8:1-4; 10:1-2; 12:12,17; 14:24; 16:6-10,13-15,40; 16:6-10,31-34,40; 17:6-7; 18:1-4,7,11,18; 28:30-31

Romans 16:5,10-15,23;

1 Cor. 1:11,16; 16:19

Colossians 4:15-16

Philemon 1-2

## ***Resources to Aid in Starting House Churches***

### **Books**

Aldrich, Joe. Lifestyle Evangelism: Learning to Open Your Life to Those Around You. Sisters, OR: Questar Publishers, Inc., 1993

Chaney, Charles L. Church Planting at the End of the Twentieth Century. Wheaton, IL.: Tyndale House Publishers, Inc., 1991.

House Church Handbook: A Resource for House Church Leaders. The Fellowship of Church Planters. 75 Capron Farm Dr., Warwick, R.I. 02886

Spader, Dann and Gary Mayes. The Everyday Commission: Discover the Joy of Partnership with God! Wheaton, IL.: Harold Shaw Publishers, 1994.

### **Wookbooks**

Blackaby, Henry T., and Claude V. King. Experiencing God: Knowing and Doing The Will Of God. (workbook) Nashville: The Sunday School Board of the Southern Baptist Convention, 1990.

### **Programs and Training Events.**

Lindsey, W.D. Operation Lydia: Planting Indigenous Churches Everywhere. (Training and Manual). 519 Sixteenth St., SE, Rochester MN 55904 (507) 282-3636

Prayer Resources. 5995 Mingle Drive, Memphis, TN 38115-6234 (901) 794-6999

The Power of One: Fulfilling the Great Commission by Creating New Bible Study Groups. (Program). Springfield, IL: Illinois Baptist State Association.