Transitioning
Taking Church
Back to Simple

Debriefing from Traditional Church
Is House Church the Answer?
Preparing our Children for Life
JESUS HAS LEFT THE BUILDING
UNDERSTANDING THE CURRENT DRAMATIC CHANGES IN AMERICAN CHURCH LIFE
National House Church Conference 2007

Dallas Texas
August 31st - September 3rd
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Network Leaders Meeting
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BACK TO THE FUTURE: LOOKING BACK AT THE NEW TESTAMENT TO UNDERSTAND HOUSE CHURCH BASICS
Regional House Church Conferences 2007

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What is Simple Church?

We all recognize that it would be ludicrous to think nailing a steeple to the roof of a house would make it a house church. However, many of us take what we’ve seen happen in church buildings our whole lives and duplicate it in our living room and call it a church. Simple church is about a change in the way we do church. As you look through this issue, here are some of the key components to keep in mind.

FOOD
When you get together, eat! It provides a great atmosphere for people to have honest, open communication with each other.

OPEN PARTICIPATION
“What then shall we say, brothers? When you come together, everyone has a hymn, or a word of instruction, a revelation, a tongue or an interpretation. All of these must be done for the strengthening of the church.” 1 Corinthians 14:26
The key is “everyone has…” Everybody should be able to participate.

BIBLE STUDY
Keep it simple and interactive. A great technique is to look over a few verses together and then share what each person has learned.

PRAYER
“They devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer.” Acts 2:42
Find out what is happening in each other’s lives and take time to pray for each other. Expect God to move powerfully and to speak to the group as you pray.

SIMPPLICITY
Make sure that whatever you do can be duplicated. If the church is going to multiply rapidly, it must be kept simple.

Church is not about the weekly gathering, it’s about a different way of life.
“Day after day, in the temple courts and from house to house, they never stopped teaching and proclaiming the good news that Jesus is the Christ.” Acts 5:42

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Christians in the United States are moving towards house churches faster than any American religious movements of the past 250 years. Maurice Smith’s article, which follows this editorial, is clear testimony to that. What is not yet clear is either the depth or the staying power of this movement. Are we watching trends that will lead to substantial changes in the American Christian landscape for generations to come, or are we witnessing a fad, yet another example of chasing “the next good thing” that we see the Lord doing.

Only time will tell. But we are part of this movement and thus we have a role in determining its outcome. Hebrews 4:2 tells us, “But the word that they heard did not profit them, not being mixed with faith in those who heard it.” The fact that God has spoken, that He is moving, does not make the outcome inevitable. We must do our share of the work. This is the mystery of His sovereignty mixed with our free will.

History teaches us some very interesting lessons. 1 Corinthians 10:11 says, regarding the Old Testament story, that “all these things happened to them as examples, and they were written for our admonition.” Surely the same is true in learning through more recent examples of God’s Spirit moving upon His people. Within my lifetime we can clearly document that such powerful moves of God as the waves of charismatic renewal since the ‘60s, the so-called “faith and word” movements of the ‘70s, and the incredible growth worldwide of church planting movements over the past 25 years, usually focused around multiplication of simple expressions of church life.

Do these movements lead us to conclude that ongoing transformation is automatic or inevitable? On the contrary, my experience in the 1970’s church planting movement in England convinced me that we can be in the center of a move of God and still miss the long-term benefits because we stop pursuing Him.

The articles in this edition of House2House magazine all reflect the reality of the current transitions going on in North American churches. We know that “unless the Lord builds the house, they labor in vain who build it” (Psalm 127:1). But He chooses to use living stones. Our response is a part of both the mix and of the end result. Our attitudes, our character, our passions all become a part of the house that the Lord is building. Look at the article on Chinese church life to see the impact they feel prayer and fasting has on their continued growth.

It is a privilege to be involved in any move of God including what is happening with simple churches in North America right now. Let’s not take that privilege for granted. But let’s also exercise our faith so that this movement does not leave us like those Old Testament saints who, because of their lack of faith, were not profited by what they heard (Heb. 4:2). It may just be that whether we are currently experiencing a period of renewal, or whether this is to be a true time of reformation and transformation within the church, is up to us! As Barna reflects in the next article, leadership in war is done by generals. My question concerns the character of these generals. We need those, who like the Lion of Judah, are ready to serve by laying down their lives.

Tony Dale
The highlight of the recent National House Church Conference was the opportunity to hear from George Barna, author of the book “Revolution.” He shared the results of a new survey to give us “The State of the House Church Movement in America.”

The State of the House Church Movement in America

Barna said that we are in the midst of a “spiritual revolution,” and that the House Church movement is representative of the heart and soul of this revolution.

Size: The size of the House Church movement in America ranges between 5 million and 20 million people each week. Roughly 9-11% of the adult population is involved on any given weekend. About 5 million view their group as a complete church.

Demographics: The demographics of the 5 million show that they are young, born again, from the south, black (four times the national average), they home school and are not registered to vote (they don’t want to be manipulated). About 66%-78% also attend a conventional style church, and 6 out of every 10 regard that as their primary church.

Longevity: 53% of current House Church participants have attended for less than 3 months. Only 21% of participants have been attending House Church for 1 year or more (Does that speak of phenomenal recent growth, or what!?)

Length of Meeting: House Churches meet for an average of 90 minutes. Only 6% meet for 3 hours or more.

Day of meeting: 29% Wednesday, 25% Sunday. For most participants, House Church appears to function as an addendum to their Sunday attendance.

Routine: 60% always follow the same routine (Hmmm, looks like you can take the person out of the box, but it’s hard to get the box out of the person.)

Average size: 15 people. 5 children. About 32% have no children involved. 50% separate kids and adults; 19% have separate and combined; 22% always have kids and adults together.

What they do: They serve one another (94%), they read the Bible (91%), they talk and eat (88%), they pray (87%), they share needs (83%), they have teaching (80%) and discussion (75%), they prophesy (71%), they have music (65%), they have communion (53%), they take offerings (43%) and they watch videos (41%).

72% of house church participants said they were satisfied with the sense of community they were experiencing.
Reflections on House Church and Spiritual Revolution

Barna said that the House Church Movement in America is currently in a struggle, because people are not really sure what to do with it. No movement runs itself, and every revolution needs great leadership. But 4 out of 5 people in America are not leaders. Here are more of Barna’s reflections and general comments on leadership:

- If you want to be a leader, give up the notion of being popular or accepted.
- A leader is called by God; you don't choose to be a leader.
- A leader's character must be developed; the passion will be developed.
- A leader must have the skills.
- A group can never go beyond where the leader can take them. The impact of a ministry is influenced by where the leader can take them.
- The environment in which this happens is WAR. Every day we wake up in the midst of a war. Leaders need to set the stage mentally, physically, and spiritually for how that war is fought.
- Leading a war is done by generals, but teachers provide most of the church leadership in this country.
- Barna defined leadership as “the act of motivating, mobilizing, resourcing and directing people to pursue and fulfill a vision from God that uniquely, strategically and intentionally advances His kingdom through life transformation.”
- Leaders do nothing until God speaks; once He speaks they do nothing but that thing.
- Everything a leader does comes back to the vision he has.
- Barna defines vision as “a compelling mental portrait of a preferable future, communicated by God to His chosen leaders, based upon an accurate understanding of God, self and circumstances, for the purpose of advancing God's kingdom.”
- Christian leadership is a revolutionary undertaking. A revolution is an overthrow of the prevalent way of living and doing.
- We need to ask ourselves, “What does it take to sustain a revolution of faith?”

Shared Characteristics of Great Revolutions

Identity – Great revolutions help people adopt causes as their personal identity. It gives them purpose. But in America, few people’s primary identity is in being a Christian. Most people first define themselves in terms of their family, their occupation, etc. For a great revolution of faith, people's attitude will need to change.

Ideology – People need to think about who and what they represent. Great revolutions are not personality driven; they are ideology driven, but only 10% of believers have a biblical world view. Great revolutions motivate people to be intolerant of other ideologies. While Christ would not teach intolerance, He would teach passion and commitment.

Intimacy – Great revolutions have new communities to which people can belong.

Impact – Great revolutions make people discover their priorities and learn what they are willing to sacrifice and endure hardship to accomplish.

Intensity - Great revolutions have great intensity. We need to focus that passion and release it like a jet engine.

Idealism – Great revolutions are characterized by “naive idealism.” People don’t know that they are seeking to do the impossible.

Immediacy – Great revolutions have a sense of urgency. People are going to hell daily. The Lord is coming back soon. This puts relentless pressure on the system we are trying to change.

Improvisation – Be able to respond in the moment to whatever the Lord or the enemy throws into your path.

Inefficiency – People who change the world are very inefficient. You cannot control reality. Inefficiency is less important than progress.

Intentional – You need a strategy for where you want to go. Leadership must be both logical and outside the box. You must love your competition while outthinking and out maneuvering it. »
Characteristics of Strategic Leadership

- Proactive not reactive
- Aggressive not defensive
- Innovative not imitative
- Inspiring not comforting
- Team-oriented not star-centered
- Cooperative not independent

Barna’s Observations on Leadership

- Expect to find leadership partners and work with them. If it’s you against the world, the world will win.
- Expect stiff spiritual opposition from the start; its presence is a sign of significance, its absence is a sign of irrelevance.
- In an environment of complexity and rapid change, incremental leadership will not win.
- Leaders cannot create a revolution; they can foster intense commitment.
- Allow inefficiency that does not undermine the effort.
- A successful revolution demands team-based leadership; no individual superstar can pull this off alone.
- Lasting results demand that children be at the heart of the process.
- Your notion of success or victory is critical. Define it as transformation.
- The face/voice of the revolution may not be the brains of the revolution.
- Timing is critical; when you sense God’s instigation, don’t hesitate.
- You will pay a surprisingly substantial price for leading a revolution; sign on for the right reasons and count the costs.

Final Considerations Regarding the House Church Movement

First, the current House Church movement is too fragmented; it is competitive rather than collaborative.

Second, the spirit expressed by many House Church people is sometimes negative toward the conventional church. We should do what God has called us to do and let God judge.

Third, our House Churches do not sufficiently emphasize the importance of growing children. The war is won or lost by the age of 13.

Now, allow me to reflect on what I heard as Barna shared.

First, Barna crystallized for me that we are in the midst of a spiritual revolution. Revolutions are usually violent, passionate and messy affairs, led by intense people. Douglas Hyde, an ex-communist, attempted to answer a simple question: “Why are Communists so dedicated and successful as leaders whilst others so often are not?” I think this is a question the House Church leaders must pose to themselves so that we know what it will take to continue succeeding.

Second, the intensity and passion of a revolutionary leader is often misconstrued by others because the existing structure is so devoid of spiritual fire and passion. Our leaders must know that their zeal may be misunderstood and be prepared to handle that.

Third, there is a tension within the House Church movement and its leadership between those who understand it as a genuine spiritual revolution and those who are seeking to treat it as a mere reorganization. Apostles and prophets lead spiritual revolutions, but consultants and staff can run a reorganization campaign. The leadership we require depends upon the goal we are trying to reach.

Fourth, I note Barna’s emphasis on the need for the House Church movement to connect with the youth. Youth are attracted to the fire, passion and vision of revolution, not the cold fluorescent light of reorganization. There’s a reason why colleges hold pre-game rallies around bonfires. Ever tried to rally a crowd around a fluorescent light bulb?

Barna has been a voice for the House Church movement, but now is the time that we must decide how much of a revolution this spiritual journey really is. Will we settle for what we get, or will we take this spark and start a fire?
The keynote sessions:

- **Why Didn't I Take the Blue Pill? The Dark Side of Organic Church** - Neil Cole
- **Qualities of a Missional Leader** - Reggie McNeal
- **Thinking Prophetically and Acting Apostolically** - Wolfgang Simson
- **Jesus Made Me Do It** - Alan Hirsch
- **Starfish Organizations: the Unstoppable Power of Decentralized Movements** - Ori Brafman
- **Mobilizing the Other Half of the Army: Women in Leadership Roles** - Felicity Dale

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The currently scheduled training events are posted on our website. Plans are being made for Greenhouses in: Los Angeles, CA; Helsinki, Finland; Chicago, IL; Calgary, Canada; Santa Maria, CA; Seattle, WA; Boulder, CO; Durango, CO; Texas; Michigan; Columbus, OH; Louisville, KY; Columbia, SC; Miami, FL and more. Check out the website for more details and to register. Interested in helping on a planning team in a region? Contact us.
Is house church the answer? by Felicity

“ It looks so close and so inviting that they assume they can move directly from one mountaintop to another. “

The simple church movement is gaining momentum. Recent media attention, both secular and Christian, reinforces our understanding that we are part of a sociological phenomenon that is impacting our world.

As thrilling as this is, we must stop and recognize that there are some inherent dangers in approaching the tipping point.

We may soon receive reports that go something like this:

“I tried house church for a year. I bought the t-shirt, read the books, went to the conference, but it wasn’t for me.”

“It didn’t work—and besides, there was nothing for my kids. I’m going back to my old church.”

Are we misleading people when we say that this move of God through simple churches could be as big as the Reformation?

As people hop on the bandwagon of this latest fad hoping that this time, all their problems with church will be solved, they will bring their baggage with them. As they bring all of their expectations and wounds into our homes, many will be disappointed.

Simple church is not a “feel good, goose bumps” movement. While home-based fellowships will be fresh and exciting at first, as people trade the formal sermons for informal meals, they will inevitably reach the point where they miss the programs that traditional church can offer. Simple churches just can’t provide the professional quality of the large-scale worship, the teaching, and, of course, the kids’ programs.

So what can we do to prepare for this potential disillusionment?

RECOGNIZE DEATH VALLEY

Wolfgang Simson describes what happens when Christians transition from traditional church to simple church. They can see the mountaintop of simple church from their position on the summit of the mountain of traditional, legacy church. It looks so close and so inviting that they assume they can move directly from one mountaintop to another.

What they do not see is the unavoidable “death valley” between the two. Leaving the mountaintop of legacy church involves a dying process—dying to good things—the diversity of the programs, the excellent teaching, the worship band, and the professional leadership. It takes time to learn to appreciate the informality of the 24/7 lifestyle of the house church, and to truly understand at a gut level that a church gathering really can be as simple as a group of people hanging out in His presence, hearing His voice and following His agenda for their time together.

This is not a sudden, painless death. It can be agonizingly slow, sometimes in terms of years, and the temptation to bail out of the process can be overwhelming. So some house churches may fail because we fail to press through “death valley.”

Cry out to God for fresh vision. Seek His face, begging Him to show you how a vibrant family of Jesus within geographical and cultural reaches of every person can transform a nation.

“HONEY, I SHRUNK THE CHURCH!”

Church is not based on where we meet. Although we have found that most of the core values of the New Testament church are easier to foster within a more intimate environment such as our homes, one of the biggest mistakes a simple...
church can make is to merely swap the four walls of the church building for the four walls of the living room. As John White likes to say, all we can claim is, “Honey, I shrunk the church!” Someone has been asked to lead the worship, and another has been asked to teach. We are holding church, as we have always known it, in our living rooms, and doing it badly! The single guitarist does not get the chords right. There is no one to prepare an intellect-stretching teaching.

But a true simple church gathering is just that—simple. We are a community of Jesus lovers with the “naïve” belief that the Holy Spirit’s agenda is more important than our own, and a willingness to press through to reach it. 1 Corinthians 14:26 describes our times together where each person’s contribution is valued and important. Once we have tasted this on a regular basis, nothing else will satisfy.

**LACK OF MISSIONAL DNA**

Simple church is, above all, a change in DNA. It is a paradigm shift in how the church of Jesus Christ thinks and operates.

Neil Cole describes organic church DNA as:

- **Divine Truth**
- **Nurturing Relationships**
- **Apostolic Mission**

If any of these are missing, a simple church will have challenges. The most likely of these core values to be absent is Apostolic Mission. If this is primarily a movement of people leaving the building to meet in small groups, then all we have seen is transfer growth, not true Kingdom expansion.

If a simple church does not have a deliberate outward focus, sooner or later it will become stagnant. For most of us, our difficulty is that all our friends are Christians. We effectively live in Christian ghettos of our own making. Our “third place,” the place where we go to relax, where everyone knows our name, is church. But most unbelievers will not darken the doors of our legacy churches, and they simply do not know or understand what simple church is or how to get involved in one.

In the Gospels, Jesus told His disciples to go (Matthew 28:18-20, Luke 10:3). They were to cross the culture barrier, to get out of their familiar environment, and to reach out to others with the Good News. To do this, we should see the simple church like melting a block of ice. Each person is encouraged to go out into their world to “be Jesus” to those around them, and like water, they will seep into every crack and crevice of society.

Jesus has a passion for the world, and we can ask Him to break our hearts with His heart for those around us who are lost and hurting.

The simple church movement is changing the landscape of Western Christianity. Let’s make sure that it stays simple by hearing Jesus’ voice and obeying Him.
“I tell you the truth, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me.”

Matthew 25:40
“What happens in Vegas, stays in Vegas” is the slogan that marketing professionals use to encourage tourists to view Las Vegas as a place without boundaries. As a kid growing up in “Sin City,” I had a very different view of it. While people were gambling away and slot machines were ringing, I was in a nearby meeting room with my family and several hundred other Christians worshiping God.

Looking back, I realize that church was part of my life every day. Mom would pull out her guitar in the evening and we would worship at home, or we would have friends over for fellowship and prayer. Our life was filled daily with some type of activity that led us back to our faith. We had prayer meetings in our home, and my parents would pray all night if a family member or friend was ill. We never knew who my parents might invite to dinner. More than that, you never knew when those dinner guests would be invited to stay indefinitely. The people my parents brought home would be considered by most the lowest of the low; broke, depressed, filthy, and definitely all alone and hopeless in the world.

I remember one woman who smelled so horrible I could barely be next to her. I don’t think she had showered in months. Amelia was an angry woman. But my mother saw beyond her pain, her smelly condition, and her “issues” and brought her to the house frequently. In time, Amelia became part of our family. Mom spent hours on the phone encouraging her with the Word of God. After a few years, Amelia became a totally different person. Because my mom became Amelia’s friend she was able to help her in both practical and spiritual areas of her life. As time went on, Amelia walked with a different attitude, and her inner beauty started to shine. I can only imagine the patience my mom had with her. Through people like Amelia, my mom and dad lived out the gospel and taught us to do the same.

It wasn’t until the last few years that I began to realize what a treasure that lifestyle was. This daily expression of faith is where the passion lies; it’s where the excitement is. Now that I am 40, my spiritual journey has become my own, and I try to be aware of Amelia’s along my path by allowing church to happen in the most unique places.

For example, over Thanksgiving the kids and I went to Texas to see my family. While visiting the mall we unexpectedly made a friend. Mary was sitting quietly on a bench. We could see the challenges of her life through the tattered clothes and the expression on her face. Mary’s story was a tragic one. She had to have her foot amputated after a bout with diabetes. The bandages were barely covering her leg, and she was not being well taken care of. She had lost her husband of 40 years just weeks before and someone had broken into her car and stolen most of her belongings, including a special cross she had given her to remember him by. Mary had not eaten in days, and only had a place to stay because a local police officer had gotten her a room in a nearby hotel.

As I stood there with my parents and my children, I thanked God for this opportunity to teach my kids what it means to live out the gospel just as my parents had done. We bought Mary some food, and dad got her phone number so he could bring her meals later. My mom bought her a cross at a little stand near us. My daughter eagerly gave it to her. As we put it on her, Mary began to cry. My mom, my daughter, and I prayed for her right there in the middle of the food court. That moment was church for all of us.

Mary would be fine. At the end of the week she would be on a bus to Tennessee where her sister agreed to care for her. But my daughter, my parents and I would be changed forever.

I am trying to be more aware of the Marys and Amelias around me. I can get so caught up with my family, work, ministry, and the everyday stuff of life, that I sometimes don’t see the people right in front of me. I am learning to purposefully look for opportunity to serve people. This is my journey, and it is fulfilling to be the church as opposed to doing church.

I have four siblings, and we all have the same passion to be church wherever we go because my parents took the time to demonstrate Christianity on a daily basis. Now I want to hand that down to my own children, teaching them to serve instead of being served, to love beyond what is required, to recognize that our finances are just a tool to help support the work of God, to see worship as an opportunity to connect with Christ, to find others with the same desire to be authentic and to do life with them. My life is simple, but I am very aware of the impact I am having not only on my kids, but also on those living life around me.

Michelle Borquez
Reaching Out

When I, Uli and our three children left conventional church four years ago it was an exciting challenge. It wasn’t so much leaving our friends, or the misunderstanding from church leaders, it was the uncertainty of moving from an ordered 40-year lifestyle of “churchism,” to a personal reliance on God in a different way than we had ever experienced.

When we had asked God how the kids fit into simple church, He said that they could not afford to not do simple church.

In the early months, the absence of traditional church left us feeling guilty. But as we sought God, a new understanding of worship developed, and God started talking to us directly out of the Word. It took time for our emotions to catch up with our brains, but over the following 24 months, we started to sense God, not just at a Sunday service, but at work, over meals, and with friends. Having separated the ritual from the real fellowship, our walk with Jesus invaded every part of our lives.

Through a direct word from God to Pete, a guy in one of our churches, we started an Alpha Kids Camp. God brought people from all walks together to support what was happening until we had over 20 volunteers. We had 70 children attend spring camp and over 80 at the autumn one. We had sports activities and games interspersed with Christian bands, sketches, gospel talks and loads of food! There were 28 children who gave their lives to Jesus and God bonded us together in a powerful way.

We are currently three churches of 10 to 15 people each. We meet on Sundays and occasionally for celebrations. We support each other in outreach ventures. Looking back, we are thankful for the road God took us on to get us here.

Rupert Bankart, Bedford, England

Thanks to a house church based small group ministry in Guayaquil, Ecuador, God is delivering young ladies from the grips of prostitution.

Miriam, for example, has not worked in prostitution for the past 10 months, but she needed a job and was greatly tempted to go back into prostitution. Just as she was ready to give up, she prayed and the Lord provided her with a job at a restaurant in the downtown area. The owner is allowing her to take off two hours on Fridays so she can continue her discipleship. The Lord provides for us beyond our expectations!

During October, 20 women participated in two conferences in which they were taught what the Scripture says concerning sexual relationships. Twelve committed themselves to the Lord to never work again in prostitution. Pray that they will seek the Lord in times of difficulty as Miriam did.

In October, we also began meeting with a new group of 30 women working in prostitution who have asked us to pray for them and their families. Please pray for them as we share the gospel! We also want to start reaching out in the southern part of Guayaquil, but we are in need of more volunteers! Pray that God will send more workers. Three of the volunteers have had family situations and will not be able to participate for some time. With 30 more women open to the gospel, we need workers!

From October 2005 to September 2006, 60 women and 30 children attended the weekly discipleship meetings. Nineteen were baptized and 10 are seriously contemplating baptism. Pray that they will all obey in believer’s baptism.

Thank you for your prayer support!

Barbara Rivers, Guayaquil, Ecuador

(Above) Prostitutes in Guayaquil attend a weekly discipleship meeting.
(Below left) Over 80 Children were in attendance at the autumn camp in 2006.

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Embracing a Theology of Death

In every town there is at least one church building worth hundreds of thousands of dollars. The church meets every Sunday morning with only eight to ten silver-haired women and one or two balding gentlemen for a “service.” Empty parking spaces, silent pulpits and dusty pews cry out for bygone days of glory. The church has been dead for years, but it is kept alive by an artificial life support system. The soul is gone, brain waves have ceased, but mechanization keeps the lungs breathing, the heart beating, and the door opening every Sunday morning at precisely 10 AM. Why? We are so desperately afraid to admit failure that we will keep the church alive as long as we can. If the church dies, God has failed and we cannot allow that.

Why are we so desperate to keep churches alive? We have lost touch with something very spiritual…death. Can it be that death is as spiritually right as life? Without death you cannot have a resurrection, the Gospel, salvation…life. Perhaps it is time to embrace a theology of death.

Self preservation is the worst treason possible against heaven. Why is it so bad? Aren’t there worse things a church can do? Self-preservation is nothing short of blasphemy; it is taking into our own hands the function of Deity. It is playing God. As a consequence, literally tens of thousands of Christians and churches are deceived into a “churchianity” that is carried out by men, for men, under the name of God.

While we clearly avoid a theology of death, the opposite is not a theology of life, for life is not what you find in churches that strive to avoid death at all costs. Some time in history we bought into a theology of “safe” as a defensive measure to avoid death. We do what is safe—for ourselves, for our families and for our churches. In fact, we are convinced that anything unsafe must be outside God’s will.

Jesus is not about safe. He is the one who said, “I send you out as sheep in the midst of wolves.” “I did not come to bring peace, but a sword.” “He who loves son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me.” These are not safe and wholesome words; they are words that shake us up and toss us out way past what is safe.

Here are two acronyms to expose some of our delusion. The first reveals our inadequate theology of SAFE. The other shows how Jesus wants us to embrace a theology of DEATH.

Safe is…
Self-preservation = our mission
Avoidance of the world and risk = wisdom
Financial security = responsible faith
Education = maturity

This is what a theology of death looks like…

Die daily to who we are
Empowering others is our life
Acceptance of risk is normative
Theology is not just knowledge, but practice
Hold tight to Christ with an open hand for everything else

Jesus said, “He who clings to his life shall lose it, but he who loses his life for my sake will find it.” We need to embrace a theology of death. Our lives depend upon it!

Neil Cole
The frog is a truly fascinating creature. Adult frogs, as opposed to their water-dwelling young, have body structures that enable them to move about on land as well as in the water. A frog is an amphibian. Similarly, the early disciples lived naturally in two environments.

Very early in His ministry, Jesus picked twelve men to walk with Him on His mission. Mark 3:14 reveals the purpose of Jesus choosing these men: “He appointed twelve, that they might be with Him and that He might send them out to preach and to have power to heal sicknesses and to cast out demons.” Here we have the two environments: community (being with Christ) and mission (being sent out). Jesus designed the church to be able to breathe, live, and thrive in two worlds.

One world exists behind closed doors, the private and intimate side of the church, where believers enjoy mutual exhortation and fellowship. The other world is all around us as soon as we walk out the door. It’s the world to which we’ve been sent. We can flourish here too. We are amphibious.

Jesus openly ate with tax collectors and sinners. What was amazing about how Jesus related to people was not only the fact that He was comfortable in that environment, but that prostitutes and drunkards were comfortable around Him. Unlike the Western Church today, Jesus had a good reputation with most of the people. The early church in Acts had the same type of reputation, “having favor with all the people” (Acts 2:47). A healthy and vibrant church is one that can flourish in both habitats, in our own intimate gatherings and in our mission to make disciples of all nations.

This is one of the signs that the church in the West may be in trouble. Many believers are not comfortable around (and are even frightened by) unbelieving people. There exists a deception that makes it feel unnatural for Christians to be with unbelievers.

Amphibians actually need to live near water for their survival. There are two reasons for this. The first reason has to do with something called “homeostasis.” All living things have this in common. They must maintain stable internal conditions to stay alive. These include heartbeat, water content, and temperature. Most amphibians control their internal temperature through a healthy balance of
time in water and time on land.

As a Christian, I cannot spend long periods of time in community and fellowship without going back out into the world to advance the kingdom of God. There is probably nothing more uplifting than having the opportunity to share Jesus with someone who doesn't know Him. However, spending too much time in the water is going to bring my temperature down to dangerous, life-threatening levels. I must get up on land once again and let the sun warm me up.

Finally, there is another reason why amphibians must be near water. Only in water can they reproduce. Staying away from water means we have no babies. Jesus said, “Go out into the entire world.” This is the only environment where we can reproduce and have more people added to the kingdom of God.

CALL ME KERMIT, THE TECHNO-COLORED FROG

A few years back I had some friends over at the house to hear my life story and listen to some of the music I had written. They were all in their early twenties, and I learned quickly what they loved to do. Every Monday night was “Techno Night” at one of the local nightclubs. They insisted that I come with them one night to experience it. I politely replied, “Well, maybe one day.” Inwardly, I dismissed the idea.

Later, during a personal time in prayer, my mind wandered to thinking about my newfound friends. The Holy Spirit said to me, “I am presenting you to them in techno-color.” After a moment of confusion over what the Lord was saying, I realized that God wanted me to go out with them “clubbing.” So, I picked up the phone and called to accept their gracious offer. They were absolutely thrilled.

In no time at all, there I was. The music was loud, the air was thick with smoke, but my companions were really happy to have me with them. I even dared to venture out onto the dance floor to partake in this cultural phenomenon. With those multicolored disco strobe lights shining down on me, I must have looked like Kermit the Frog in a white John Travolta suit. I remember thinking while I was dancing, “I hope this is okay with you, Jesus. I'm doing this for you, and to reach out to these people. You told me to go. So, here I am.”

Meeting them on their turf went a long way. I'm sure they knew that it wasn't my regular scene and they never asked me to do it again. However, from that point on everything changed. One time was all it took to win their hearts. They let me into their world. They also let Jesus in. Each one of them, over the next several months, gave me a place to speak to them about my faith and relationship with Christ. They were truly open to hear what I had to say. It's as though I suddenly had a voice. We need to return to our true nature as followers of Christ. Let's get our feet wet once again and thrive out in the place where people live.

Paul Vieira

Taken from his new book, Jesus Has Left the Building.
As Patty was driving down the road near Boise, she experienced the strangest sensation. She distinctly felt God tell her to go pick that woman up; how weird. Yet, it was clear, God wanted her to pick that woman up; so she did. The woman’s name was Jinger (named after the starlet on Gilligan’s Isle). She was a Peruvian immigrant. As the conversation progressed, Patty invited Jinger to her weekly Bible study led by my niece Kelly. Jinger became a Christian at that Bible study.

This October 12\textsuperscript{th} (a Thursday), I was visiting family and friends in Boise. Kelly, who has had an ongoing interest in simple church, invited her friends to meet us for supper and learn more about simple churches. Among the people who came was Jinger. Because Margi and I speak Spanish, we could converse with her at a deeper level. She had some simple, straight forward questions. Did we need a clergy to do this, (no)? Could she do this, (yes)? Would it be alright to start with her non-Christian family (most definitely yes)? Her most interesting question of all, as far as I was concerned was about how we were funded. She wanted to know if she needed to pay to attend the meeting (most definitely not!). Jinger left early, so she asked Margi to tell me to call her.

The first opportunity I had to call Jinger was Saturday at noon. Jinger had already planted a church with her non-Christian family. In about 36 hours she had gone from new Christian to church planter. And yes, it can be just that easy to get started. And yes, I am well aware of the potential problems. Problems don’t scare me, being out of the harvest does.

Let me teach you some simple church vocabulary. Jinger is what we commonly call a “person of peace.” She is someone God divinely sets up for his “workers in the harvest” to meet. People of peace encounters (Luke 10:6) usually have a supernatural edge. People of peace commonly allow workers to start churches in their house, or just do it themselves; which is exactly what we want to happen.

Does Jinger have a lot to learn? Sure. Is she adequate to do this job? No, but are you adequate to do anything for God? I know I’m not. She can learn on the job. In the process she will probably be pushing Kelly’s envelope and maybe Patty’s. They will all enter a steep learning curve. Which in and of itself is good. They are now in the organic harvest. They are not merely learning about ministry, they are doing it. They will learn in this process that no one can do anything for God; but God can do much through those who make themselves available to Him. What if Jinger fails? It is a learning opportunity. What if she makes mistakes? It is a learning opportunity. What if this takes off so fast that it gets out of control (a distinct possibility)? It will be an opportunity to see just what God can do. And all the while, a whole group of people are learning in the harvest and becoming more effective harvesters. Boy, is this fun.

Ross Rohde

Jinger’s Story

Jinger went from new Christian to house church planter in 36 hours.
Yee-Haw! My first “Open Church” Experience

At the close of a three day leadership and character development seminar, several believers who had participated decided to have an impromptu “open church” service. About twelve of us gathered on the patio outside the host hotel. A lady who had prior experience with open church made suggestions that moved the service along, although no one was really “in charge.”

We began by singing praises. Anyone who was led simply began a song and we all joined in. Then we moved to quoting scripture. After a few minutes of that, she said she sensed someone needed prayer. That’s when things really began to happen.

A young man raised his hand for prayer and shortly thereafter confessed faith in Christ. Two others who had come to Christ the day before received prayer ministry for cleansing from unclean spirits. Two brothers who are lawyers also came to Christ. These, along with other precious souls, had religious backgrounds ranging from nothing to cults.

There was prayer ministry and prophetic ministry happening like a whirlwind! Everyone was ministering and everyone was ministered to. I looked up from my busy place to see the first young man who had confessed faith in Christ laying hands on a new believer who had been an alcoholic!

What a glorious picture of the body of Christ continuing His ministry on the earth! By the time we broke up, the number of participants had peaked at about 45-50. All this activity seemed to last about 30 minutes. However, I looked at my watch to discover I’d been on my feet ministering wholeness in various ways for about three and a half hours!

This experience has created such a desire to see God at work in my church and my local area that I have only one response—I WANT MORE!

Ken Stone, Baptist Pastor

Everyday Church

House church is an especially difficult concept for people who live in our small town. Loyalty is held in high regard, and not going to church is considered a social sin. So I don’t call the meetings that I am involved in “house churches,” and attendees still maintain membership at a mainline church. However, there are many avenues to begin to accomplish what house church can do for believers, and I am honored to be a part of it.

I meet with a couple of different groups on a regular basis. In one group, a man named Doug has recently realized the grace of God and has since begun a new career in real estate. He has stopped taking 17 of his 21 pills a day and has shared his testimony with his traditional church. His faith and health continue to improve.

In a separate group, we shared communion after a lady shared what the Lord has shown her on the subject. It is wonderful to see how the Lord leads and directs us when we surrender our time and agendas to him.

Through these experiences, I am discovering that the biggest obstacle to “house church” gatherings is the ingrained need to “go to church” and be passively led in experiencing God and in following Him. It takes patience to wait till people begin to understand that they can see Him for themselves.

But still, I see a lot of promise in new groups arising both in my workplace, in my new home, and with the ladies of the “Lighthouse” mission where I serve once a week. I don’t know how or when these simple churches will arise, but I am confident that they will in the Lord’s timing.

Carolyn Spence

Having “church” is an event that requires little more than a few people coming together and welcoming the presence of the Lord.
RESOURCES

Visit www.house2house.com and click on our bookstore for a complete selection of resources.

**Getting Started**
*Felicity Dale*

We all recognize that it would be ludicrous to think nailing a steeple to the roof of a house would make it a house church. However, many of us take what we’ve seen happen in church buildings our whole lives, and duplicate it in our living room and call it a church. Simple church is not really about a change of location; it’s about a change in the way we do church. This practical guide will change the way you view church and church planting.

*Paperback* $19.99  
*PDF* $12.99 (sale price)

**Pagan Christianity**
*Frank Viola*

Have you ever wondered why we Christians do what we do for church every Sunday morning? Have you ever asked yourself any of the following questions: Why do we “dress up” for church? Why does the pastor preach a sermon every Sunday? Where did these things come from? This volume makes an outrageous proposal: That most of what we Christians do in our modern churches has no root in the New Testament. *Pagan Christianity* is the first book ever penned that documents the entire story of where our modern church practices came from.

*Paperback* $9.99

**Megashift**
*James Rutz*

A megashift of spiritual power into the hands of ordinary people is about to overwhelm the world and put it into vastly better shape. Prepare yourself to take part in a total makeover of Planet Earth! Over a billion non-Christians may become highly active Christians in the next dozen years. A whole new form of Christianity promises to bring a far greater impact than the Protestant Reformation. Millions of ordinary people are doing miracles. God has brought hundreds of people back from the dead, mostly in the last 15 years.

*Paperback* $13.99

**Jesus Has Left the Building**
*Paul Vieira*

When you sit in church on Sunday, do you ever get the feeling that something is missing? Do you long for a deeply genuine connection with God and other believers but often walk away empty and unsatisfied? You are not alone. Many churchgoers are stumbling onto a path that leads out to the other side of the stained-glass window. They are finding God there and discovering a powerful truth – we are the church!

*Paperback* $17.99
Simply Church
Tony and Felicity Dale

Get ready to change the way you view church! Have you ever read about the early church in the New Testament, and longed for that kind of relationship with other believers? The early church spread and touched lives everywhere. Do you ever wish that you had more power to change your community? Do you want to follow the Great Commission, to “GO,” but don’t know how?

Paperback $9.99

When You Come Together

All over the world, people are moving to a simpler expression of church, longing for a place where everyone can be involved. Having answered the call to simplicity, many are asking the question, “What do we actually do when we come together?” Simple church is not just a miniaturized version of what’s been done before...it’s a whole new way of life.

DVD $12.99

An Army of Ordinary People
Felicity Dale

This powerful collection of stories shines the light on the Holy Spirit’s activity sweeping the U.S. today. God is mobilizing an army of ordinary people to carry out His extraordinary work in simple ways around the globe.

Paperback $16.99
Audio CDs $12.99 (on sale)

Divided by Faith
Michael O. Emerson & Christian Smith

Through a nationwide telephone survey of 2,000 people and an additional 200 face-to-face interviews, Michael O. Emerson and Christian Smith probed the grassroots of white evangelical America. They found that despite recent efforts by the movement’s leaders to address the problem of racial discrimination, evangelicals themselves seem to be preserving America’s racial chasm.

Paperback $15.99

Tidal Wave

People all over America are moving into simple forms of church life by the millions. This 30 minute DVD explores the phenomenon, and places it in Biblical, historical, and current context. Get ready for a wonderful introduction to this exciting spiritual movement.

DVD $12.99

Why Not Women?
Loren Cunningham and David J. Hamilton

Why Not Women? brings light, not just more heat, to the church’s crucial debate. It is a detailed study of women in Scripture, historical and current global perspectives, and an examination of the fruit of women in public ministry.

Paperback $15.99

The Untold Story of the New Testament Church
Frank Viola

This unique Bible handbook weaves Acts and the Epistles together chronologically, creating one fluid story! This epic volume gives readers a first-hand account of the New Testament drama that is riveting and enlightening. It includes dates, maps, and background information about the people, the cities, and the events of the first-century church using a “you-are-there” approach.

Paperback $11.99

Visit www.house2house.com and click on our bookstore for a complete selection of resources.
AN INTERVIEW WITH TWO MEN CONNECTED WITH THE PERSECUTED CHURCH IN CHINA.

Q: How much do the people fast and pray in the house churches of China?

Bro Ren: Let us take prayer first. The leaders of the church in China try to pray three to four hours a day. That is normal. But then there are some brethren who are totally committed to pray. Almost every minute they are awake, they are praying.

Bro Paul: I know a brother who never sleeps more than two hours a night. He prays for 22 hours a day. The brothers and sisters pray always, and there are many all-night prayer vigils. I have been to some of these prayer meetings. By morning, the floor is slippery because of all the tears that flow during prayer.

Q: What about fasting? What part does fasting play in all these testimonies we have heard?

Bro Ren: There are two kinds of fasting in China. Most of the pastors have to fast because they don’t have money to buy food. It is a natural part of their lives. The other kind of fasting is out of a burden for someone or some spiritual issue.

The first time we sent about twenty people out to preach, nineteen of them were arrested; one came back to report. Everyone else was detained for six months. We sent another group. The same thing happened. One lady came home on a stretcher. They smashed her skull. She was paralyzed, but later God restored her. When there is resistance like this in one specific location, then the whole team fasts and prays. Usually this kind of fasting will break the yoke within thirty days, and then the Gospel has free course.

Q: What does the Chinese church believe about the Book of Acts?

Bro Paul: They would say, “We are there. It is our normal Christian life.” They believe that Acts is a demonstration of the normal Christian life. It is a testimony of the resurrected Christ, and He is still the same today. They do not believe that miracles have passed away.

Bro Ren: We have to understand that the Gospel that is preached in China is a little bit different. The emphasis is not only intellectual and mental messages. It is fifty percent preaching, fifty percent showing the power of the Gospel. There is always an expectation and readiness for miracles. It is normal that any time the message of the Gospel is pronounced, there is a demonstration of the power of God in that situation. People can see clearly that Jesus is the Son of God, and that He is the Savior of the world. The church of China is not praying for miracles, but they are living in miracles.

Q: How do our Chinese brothers live out the Great Commission?

Bro Paul: They believe there is only one reason why God has left them here on earth: that is to evangelize the lost. Anyone who is not actively pursuing this holy purpose is missing the mark. The Great Commission cannot be compromised. Their methods are anointed preaching with signs following. The leaders instruct the evangelism teams to go to a new village and inquire about the worst problem in the village. Then they are to go and minister to that problem and show that Jesus is the all-powerful Savior. With this success, they turn to the people and preach Jesus to them.

Denny Kenaston
The Remnant Magazine

For the entire interview, use the following link.
The article can be found under January/February 2003:
www.charityministries.org/theremnant/theremnant-textonly.cfm
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In 1992, I asked the Lord a question: “What is the church?” I asked the question partly because of a stirring in my spirit, but also because I was part of the leadership of a thousand plus member church with a million dollar a year budget. Although our church and Christian school generated over a million dollars a year in income, money was tight.

I read the New Testament, especially the book of Acts, with new eyes. I read scriptures such as these:

“There were no needy persons among them.”
(Acts 4:34a)

“Greet also the church that meets at their house.”
(Romans 16:5)

“What then is my reward? Just this, that in preaching the gospel I may offer it free of charge and so not make use of my rights in preaching it.”
(1 Corinthians 9:18)

“I have not coveted anyone’s silver or gold or clothing. For you yourselves know that these hands of mine have supplied my own needs and the needs of my companions.”
(Acts 10:33-34)

Reading these and other verses led us to resign our leadership position and embark on a journey called “house church.” Instead of “going to church,” we started to “be the church” that meets in a home. Our mission was to be a 1,000 member church meeting in 50-80 homes with a $1,000,000 budget with 80% going to benevolence and missions (local and foreign).

Over the last 13 years we have been able to deploy approximately $1 million away from building payments and salaries towards benevolence and missions. We have helped plant over 450 churches in India, influenced our community, and saved a life through benevolence giving.

A Life Saved
With our benevolence account we can quickly use our funds to help people both inside and outside our church. Recently, we became aware of a single mother who couldn’t pay her rent. She was a day away from eviction. After going to a number of churches (including her own) and agencies without...
finding help, a friend of hers contacted us. We wrote a check for her rent and the friend took it to her, along with a pizza. After eating together and visiting, she went into her bedroom and brought out a suicide note. We thank God and are humbled that He used us like this.

Dan’s Biker Bar
One of the local ministries we support is the Mission Soup Kitchen. The only other regular monthly support they receive is from Dan’s Biker Bar. The Association of Home Churches and Dan’s Biker Bar work together to feed the poor and homeless. Who would have thought?

When we started in 1992, the few people who learned of us wondered if we were scriptural or a cult. Today, the Association of Home Churches is known and respected in our community, mainly because of our consistent giving. Jesus says in Matthew 5:16, “Let them see your good works and glorify your Father in Heaven.”

Should We Pay Our Pastors or Not?
The scriptures clearly teach “the workman is worthy of his hire.” The Apostle Paul modeled tentmaker ministry. Imagine, the leader of the Christian Revolution said, “We worked night and day, laboring and toiling so that we would not be a burden to any of you. We did this not because we don’t have a right to such help, but in order to make ourselves a model for you to follow.” (2 Thessalonians 3:7-9) In our network we have decided not to take a salary so we could be a model.

The Percentage Method
Even as home churches with no building payments or salaries, some months we found ourselves unable to meet our pledges. We had made commitments to a number of different ministries and missions and on a slow-giving month we couldn’t meet them. One of the brothers suggested, “Instead of a dollar amount, let’s give a percentage of what comes in to each ministry we support.” What a blessing that idea has been. Now there is always enough. We notified each ministry and let them know that we would be changing from a dollar commitment to a percentage commitment. Now these ministries pray that God gives us an increase because the more we take in, the more they get!

Beyond missions and benevolence, we have percentages going to funds that help send our youth to camp, that help families go to conferences, and that support short-term mission trips. We have an emergency reserve in case someone in the church becomes unemployed or has some other emergency.

Around December 1st, we take any excess money and distribute it to families in the church that may not be doing as well as others. This way there is a nice holiday season for all.

The Big (Financial) Bang
We are in the middle of an unprecedented shift in the church (read Barna’s book “Revolution”). It’s important in the home church movement to network and use our resources to further the Kingdom of God. Initially, many house churches seemed to be throwing the baby out with the bath water regarding finances. They viewed the clamor for money in Christendom brought about financial abuses, and they were right. But what an opportunity to be good stewards and impact society around us. The Book of Acts ends with the Apostle Paul preaching and teaching IN HIS OWN RENTED HOUSE (Acts 28:30-31). Could we now be picking up where the book ended 2000 years ago?
Once while playing basketball with some friends, I made one of those long-distance shots. As the ball was in midair, I found myself making gestures telling the ball to move over! Suddenly, the Spirit of God spoke to me saying, “You’ve got to put everything into the ball before you release it. You can cry, moan and groan all you want, but once the ball is released from your hand, it’s too late.” Then He said, “You’ve got to put everything into your children before you release them.”

As one working with or teaching children, I believe it is much better to prepare lives than to repair lives. I never met a person who was sorry he came to Christ at an early age, but I’ve met many men and women who were sorry that they didn’t. They’re doing a lot for God, but just think what could have happened if someone had reached them when they were just a little child. It is so much easier to prepare a child for life than to repair an adult.

THE LITTLE FISH
Jesus said, “I will make you fishers of men.” Children are like little fish—we can catch them for Christ so easily. But what do we do when we catch a little fish? We throw it back in the river saying, “You’re too little.” That’s what the church has been doing to our children for centuries. We’ve been sending them back into the world because of our stupidity.

The Church seems to be the only ones who want to wait to influence a child’s mind. The child abusers don’t wait. The advertisers certainly don’t wait. The secular humanists and cults don’t wait. Wake up Church! We’ve got to reach the children while they are young.

BECAUSE SOMEONE CARED ENOUGH
I grew up in Buffalo, New York. My mom and dad were divorced when I was three years old. My mom worked twelve to fourteen hours a day to keep the three of us clothed and fed. We lived in a government housing project, which was very near a church. I loved going to church, and every time the doors were open, I was there. I asked Jesus into my heart when I was six years old.

Every time I walked through those big doors, there was a man waiting there for me. He made me feel like I was his favorite kid in the whole church. He would
bend over and hug and squeeze me really tightly and sometimes pick me up and swing me around. Not only did he love me on Sunday, but throughout the week he would call me on the phone to ask how my family was doing. He would come by sometimes and take us all out for ice cream.

This is why I do what I do with such a passion: because I realize what one man or one woman can do for just one child. Did he know when I grew up that I would be traveling the world doing mission trips with young people? No, but he loved me just the same.

MAKE THINGS HAPPEN
There are three types of people in the world today: those who make things happen, those who watch things happen, and those who wonder what happened. Those working with children need to be the kinds of people who make things happen. Paul writes in 1 Corinthians 2:4, “My preaching and teaching was not with enticing words of man’s wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power.” Demonstration is the manifestation of the Spirit of God. When the Holy Spirit shows up, there are demonstrations of the Spirit and power. God is not expecting you to come up with eloquent words to minister to children. He’s expecting you to minister with signs and wonders.

CHILDREN CAN MINISTER TOO!
A child doesn’t have a junior Holy Spirit while we as adults have a big Holy Spirit. It doesn’t work that way. When God gives out His Spirit, He gives it without measure and without size. Children just need someone to train them to do the work of the ministry.

Jesus said, “Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature ... And these signs will follow those that believe ...” (Mark 16:15, 17a). For many years we’ve been taking children all over the world. What do they do? They preach, they teach, and they lay hands on the sick. I step back and watch.

While ministering on one of our mission trips, I asked those who needed healing to raise their hands, and about 200 hands went up. I said to the kids, “Begin to pray for those who have their hands raised.” As I watched, there was a nine-year-old boy who prayed for a woman in a wheelchair. He told her to get up and walk; however, she tried but could not get up. With his faith in full force, and with his own physical strength, he helped the lady out of the chair. She not only stood up but she began to walk!

GOD HAS SAVED THE BEST FOR LAST
It is an exciting time to be alive! God is pouring out His spirit upon all flesh and our sons and our daughters are prophesying and speaking forth God’s word with boldness and power.

God is an awesome God and He is faithful. And he has saved the best for last!
I strongly believe that the underlying reality of the church is none other than Jesus Christ Himself. Not as a doctrine, or as a belief system, or as a set of moral teachings, but as a living Person who has thoughts, feelings, and volition. To my mind, any ecclesiology that does not make Christ absolutely central in its life, mission, and expression cannot be rightly called “deep.”

The church is the indwelling of Christ in a group of localized people by the Holy Spirit. Those models and forms of church which best enact this reality, giving it visible expression, are adequate toward fulfilling a deep ecclesiology.

It took me many theological searches to come to this...
understanding. I started with revivalist theology. Then I started focusing on the power of God, End Time prophecy studies, a study of Christian doctrine, and apologetics.

After I dropped pursuing doctrine and theology, I became involved in a lot of other Christian “things.” I majored in holiness, then in faith as I learned the principles of “walking in” and “living by” faith. I became deeply involved in “worship and praise”—deeming both to be the central desire of God. Then it was ministry to the poor. Then personal prophecy. The point? In the first eight years of my Christian experience, I learned to major in a slew of “Christian things,” but . . . they were just things!

All of the churches and movements I was involved in had effectively preached to me an “it.” Evangelism is an it. The power of God is an it. Eschatology is an it. Christian theology is an it. Christian doctrine is an it. Faith is an it. Apologetics is an it.

I made the striking discovery that I don’t need an it. I have never needed an it. And I will never need an it. Christian its—no matter how good or true—eventually wear out, run dry, and become tiresome.

I don’t need an it . . . I need a Him!

We do not need things. We need Jesus Christ!

You can chase things until you are blue in the face. And there will always be some Christian who is peddling a new it or a thing upon which to center your life. Warning: If you buy into it, you will most certainly miss Him.

When I realized that Christ was everything in the Christian life and that the Father had put all spiritual things into Him, it radically changed my life. Gone were the days where I sought “things.” Gone were the days where I chased after Christian truths, doctrines, and theologies. A new chapter had opened where I began to seek Christ Himself. I sought to be drowned in the face of the knowledge of my Lord. For I discovered that in Him exists everything that I need.

In other words, Jesus Christ not only reveals the way to His people, He is the Way. Jesus Christ not only reveals the truth to His people, He is the Truth. Jesus Christ is not only the giver of life, He is the Life (John 14:6). Christ is the embodiment of all that He gives! He is All. He is everything to everyone who has received His life.

Jesus Christ is Hope (1 Tim. 1:1)
Jesus Christ is Peace (Eph. 2:14)
Jesus Christ is Wisdom (1 Cor. 1:30)
Jesus Christ is Redemption (1 Cor. 1:30)
Jesus Christ is Holiness (1 Cor. 1:30)
Jesus Christ is Righteousness (1 Cor. 1:30)

You will never have an authentic experience of the Body of Christ unless your foundation is blindly and singularly Jesus Christ. And before we can understand what the church does, we must first understand what the church is.

According to Scripture, the church is not a human creation. Instead, it existed before creation (in Christ) and before culture began. God created the universe for the church and not the other way around. God created the universe so that He might have a Bride, a Body, a House, and a Family.

Consequently, the church was not an afterthought or a means to an end. The church is the end! God’s ultimate purpose is to transform the world into the church—which is Jesus Christ in corporate human expression.

A deep ecclesiology, then, esteems all Christians wherever they are on the basis that they are membered to Jesus Christ. Those models of church which make Jesus Christ central in its life, its mission, and its expression are faithful to a deep ecclesiology. Those models which clash with the church’s DNA—which is Christ—are incompatible with a deep ecclesiology.

This article has been excerpted from the author’s new book God’s Ultimate Passion: Unveiling the Purpose Behind Everything.
God’s Ultimate Passion takes you on a guided tour of the Bible, tracing three interwoven storylines from Genesis to Revelation. It expresses the intensity, hope, and wonder of an engaged, grass-roots, visionary practitioner. It will help new readers of the Bible get the big picture, and it will help seasoned Christians remember what really matters.

Brian McLaren, author/activist (brianmclaren.net)

God’s Ultimate Passion is a masterpiece that takes seven thousand years of human history and simplifies it so that the reader can understand what has always been God’s passion. It looks beyond the hands of God into His mind and heart as it places our lives and purposes in divine perspective. This is a must read for those who believe and others who want to believe. God’s Ultimate Passion reads like a movie on paper . . .

Dr. Myles Munroe, author of Rediscovering the Kingdom

Some books are meant to be read and shelved. That’s not true of the “Classics.” Through the generations, books that are Classic speak to new generations who were not even born when it was written. It’s a book for this hour, without a doubt. But it will be a book for years and years to come. It has captured truth in simple language that speaks to the heart, not just the head. God’s Ultimate Passion is one of those books. Upon reading it, I have ordered a case to be sent to people I know who must digest its message. I thank the Lord for the anointing that is upon its pages.

Dr. Ralph W. Neighbour, author of Where Do We Go From Here? and founder of the Cell Church Movement

This poetic exposé by Frank Viola is indeed a masterful work of art – a modern day mystical classic for sure. It is with a burning heart that I commend to you God’s Ultimate Passion.

Dr. James W. Goll, Encounters Network, author of The Lost Art of Practicing His Presence, The Seer, Dream Language, etc.

In this groundbreaking book, Frank Viola introduces us to three tales that furnish us with a breathtaking glimpse into God’s highest passion. The first is the story of a God who is an ageless romantic driven by one consuming pursuit. The second is the tale of a God who has sought for an eternity to have a resting place—a habitation—a home. The third is the tale of a God from another realm who visits planet earth to establish a heavenly colony that will give Him visible expression.

All of these tales telescope into one another. They are but three scenes of one grand drama. Each of them is shrouded in a sacred mystery. A mystery that has been “hid in God for ages.” The New Testament authors, especially Paul of Tarsus, unveil these three tales with maddening passion. Each tale flows out of the ultimate passion that lies resident within the throbbing heart of God. They are, as it were, His central intention behind creating the universe. Put together, these three tales embody “God’s story”—the great interpretive narrative by which we may better understand the Bible, the Christian life, and our world. And that story is the chief reason why He created you!

So watch the drama unfold and explore afresh the eternal passion of your God. In so doing, you shall find your own purpose and the passion by which to fulfill it.

From the Preface

“As I write these words, there is a groundswell occurring in the Christian family today. The spiritual terrain is rapidly changing. There is a revolution fomenting in both the practice and mission of the church. It is my opinion that this revolution is of God. However, I fear that it will lack depth and focus—and ultimately longevity—if it is not fueled by a sighting of God’s ultimate passion.”

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10:2b Answer
I recently took a shuttle bus from the airport to a conference in Denver. I had been praying through Luke 10:1-7. There were only two passengers in the bus, a rather talkative guy from Modesto and myself. The other guy yakked about partying in Denver and then he asked me what I did. I told him I was a missionary, which kind of threw cold water on everything.

He asked me about my work, so I told him about simple churches. Just as we arrived at his hotel he asked the driver what he thought. The driver said he was just listening to our conversation with interest. When the guy got out, the driver asked me about house church planting. How do you disciple, how do you evangelize, what is the leadership structure, how do you appoint elders? Obviously, this guy knew quite a bit about ministry. So, I told him what we did and why and arranged for pick up after the conference.

When the bus came back for me, I had the same driver. We immediately started talking about house church. It turns out that he is an Ethiopian Evangelical and he had told his family about house church, and they all liked the idea.

This Bible School grad was going back to Ethiopia to get permission to plant churches there. He is now seriously considering planting house churches. I told him that I habitually prayed through Luke 10:1-7 and that I thought he was a 10:2b answer. He agreed that he was.

This is another example of the fact that praying Luke 10:1-7 is powerful stuff. Jesus told us to do it, and it really does work. Pray for Belaye as he begins this exciting journey.

Ross Rohde

Stories from the Harvest
My friend Gabriel contacted me in January asking that I come visit him and meet the people in his simple churches. In February I came to his apartment, which was filled with vibrant new Christians. There I met Zizi, Gabriel’s girlfriend.

As we began eating, Zizi described how God had used her to plant churches. She said that one day the Lord told her to go to a certain room at the hospital. There she found a crying pregnant woman. The woman said that she had always wanted a child, but the doctors recommended an abortion because her life was in danger. Knowing this was not God’s will, Zizi prayed for the woman, left her a card, and went home. A number of days later, the woman called Zizi and asked her to come to her home.

When Zizi arrived, the apartment was filled with friends and relatives. The pregnant woman told her friends, “This is the woman who healed me.” Zizi responded, “I prayed, Jesus healed. Let me tell you about my Jesus.” That day everyone in the apartment came to Christ and a church was born.

A while later this same woman, still pregnant, sat next to another pregnant woman on a Madrid Metro train who was crying because her doctor was recommending abortion for similar reasons. “Don’t do it; call Zizi!” She gave this new woman Zizi’s number; another baby was saved, another church was born.

By February 5th, Zizi had planted seven churches in three months. Since then Gabriel and Zizi have gotten married and continued to plant churches. By mid-August around 30 churches had started. A few have died, but most live on. There are many new Christians. These Christians are growing and some are actually beginning to start churches of their own.

Ross Rohde
In the early years of the Jesus Movement, I was in my 20's and newly married. Hot topics included whether churches were legitimate if not connected to denominations, whether drums were appropriate for worship, whether churches should let barefoot seekers enter and whether you had to be seminary trained to “hear from God.”

Now, 25 years later, the spiritual landscape has changed. Fellowship sprouts up via book clubs and blogs, in coffee shops and living rooms. Questions in this migration toward simplicity include: What is church? Where can it happen? What about the tithe, the kids, authority?

In spite of all our efforts, traditional church is losing the culture war and becoming increasingly irrelevant in the process. No county in the U.S. boasts anything but transfer growth; we are not attracting the lost; a million people a year are leaving. It’s nothing personal and it’s a cheap shot to lay blame. Simply put, our systems have failed.

Increasing numbers of us are heading “back to the future” to pioneer simple but relevant pockets of community life. We dream of explosive growth reminiscent of the early church. New wineskins need to be ready because people matter. Some of us have jumped on the simple church bandwagon—it’s fresh, it’s Biblical, and it’s a handy off-ramp for anyone disillusioned, wounded or worn out by the system.

Not so fast. Running “from” something is very different than running “to.” He wants our full attention so He can give us His heart for our neighbors and the nations. In that process we are transformed into His missional nature and character. Many of us believe simple church is the most effective and strategic way of living out community and accomplishing God’s purposes here and now.

This in-between stage has its challenges. Transition seasons are rarely comfortable. Whether it’s something personal we’re going through or something we corporately face, we tend toward insecurity. Our identity is shaken. It’s easy to be ambivalent about the future. Thank God His grace covers us as we plow through. What started looking like a great escape may even turn out to be a divine ambush.

As a trained debriefer, I help people in transition move with grace from the past to what’s ahead. I believe that experience is not necessarily the best teacher but evaluated experience may be. Soldiers returning from war need debriefing as do missionaries home on furlough as do regulars like us migrating from a traditional church model to something quite different.

In debriefing, life can be examined from many angles including emotions, experiences, belief systems, core values, and calling. It’s as much about validating the journey as it is about the conclusions.

We are corporately on the crest of a massive spiritual paradigm shift. What better time than now to debrief what God is doing within us? There are dozens of questions that can be processed. Here are a few:

- If it’s true that the glory of God is man fully alive, how would you describe your heart right now?
- What do you do with your pain?
- How do you feel about your transition from traditional church to simple church? Use adjectives.
- How are you cooperating with His process to make you into a new wineskin? What is a new wineskin? What is new wine? (Matt 9:16-17)
- In your previous season of growth, what have you enjoyed most and what have you endured?
- What losses are you grieving? What are you celebrating?
- Is anything left undone as you conclude the most recent season?
- What baggage do you still need to let go of to keep things simple, authentic, and easily reproducible?
- What are your expectations of simple church?

In order to offer the best debriefing we can, here are a few additional comments.

Are you an outward or inward processor? How do you know? Verbal communicators enjoy sharing feelings and thoughts with others. In fact, it is often in the process of talking that verbal processors discover what they really think.
Inward processors may prefer to contemplate or journal their thoughts. That’s fine to a certain extent, but God has predisposed us for interdependency. Everyone appreciates a listener who gives good eye contact, listens carefully and doesn’t interrupt. When someone is sharing their heart, it isn’t the time to “one-up” the story or give advice. Debriefing should be an intentional, thoughtful process. The person responding should feel safe with the debriefer.

An easy tool to remember is these simple words: inward, upward, outward and forward. Inward is what’s happened/is happening inside you. Upward is what has happened/is happening in your relationship with God. Outward is how what has happened/or is happening affects those around you. Forward is for expressing expectations on what is next.

Have them share feelings before facts. Feelings are powerful and easily cloud the facts. In sharing feelings, encourage the person to try to identify the exact word that seems most fitting. This is a healthy process. We learn more about who we are, what we believe, how we want to live, and we can even consider course corrections.

Sometimes seasons of life warrant some measure of personal “closure” in order to move forward. A friend of mine has a collection of stones, one for each of her major life transitions which she displays prominently in her home. She loves to share what season each stone represents.

Walking with God in this hour brings a high sense of adventure. The drama of His intervention keeps us hungry for more. We’re excited that everyone has gifts and can use them. We want nurturing relationships. We can almost feel Him cheering us on as we risk loving people on their turf instead of insisting they come to ours.

As we launch into simple church let’s be “all there.” As we seek His heart He gives us His passion. He wants to trust us with the lives of men and women.

Julie Ross
Several years ago, after I caught the vision for planting house churches, I began to notice that many house church people had an “us and them” attitude. When they came together, they would denounce traditional churches. This disunity grieved God deeply, and He shared some of that pain with me so that I can better understand His heart and share it with others.

Through this, God gave me a declaration of unity and told me to say it often and teach it wherever I went. His truth is simple:

“I belong to everything that belongs to Jesus, and everything that belongs to Jesus belongs to me. It is not, “Us and them.” It is just “Us!” There is only one Body of Christ, and the problems of the church are our problems, for we are the church! The problems of the church, the whole church, are OUR problems, for WE are the church. And we can do more together than we can do alone!”

Before I received this declaration of unity, I had read a poem by Edwin Markham that shares this mindset:

In 1990, when I first read of the “house church movement” I thought my friends would share my enthusiasm and catch the same vision. I was sadly mistaken. The declaration of unity helped and the poem above told me what to do.

They drew a circle that shut me out — Heretic, rebel, a thing to flout. But Love and I had the wit to win: We drew a circle that took him in!

Can we embrace everything and everyone that Jesus embraces, even if they do not see things and say things like we do? He is Lord of the whole church, even a church like the one Paul planted in Corinth that was full of problems and carnal believers! We should, and by His grace, we will!

Robert Fitts
The fastest growing movement in the world today is the Christian movement and the leading edge of this movement is the supernatural ministry of miracles, signs, and wonders. People are healing the sick in Jesus’ name just as the disciples were told to do in Luke 10:8-9.

This has not always been the case. Until recently the most rapid growth of Christianity took place in very early church history where their prayer was, “Father, grant to your servants that with all boldness we may speak your word, by extending your hand to heal and that signs and wonders be done in the name of Jesus!” (Acts 4:29-30) After the first 300 years, believers lost this fire until now when people are once again seeking a powerful resurgence of the healing ministry.

The Prayer Clinics are one way to help fuel this fire. It is launched with several hours of intense training in the biblical basis for divine healing followed by weekly instruction and hands-on experience in healing the sick.

The Lord is leading me to help start the Prayer Clinics wherever He opens doors for me, in house churches as well as in traditional churches. If you are led of the Lord to start this ministry in your area, please contact me for more information.

Robert Fitts
robertjoni@gmail.com
The National Diversity Team

“After this I looked and there before me was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne and in front of the Lamb.” (Revelation 7:9)

What an awesome sight!!! A countless assembly of God’s people standing before the eternal, all-encompassing throne of the Most High God and the precious, redeeming Lamb, Jesus Christ. Through this timeless, albeit time-fulfilling prophetic writing, we get a wonderful glimpse into heaven. We not only see the majestic throne and the sacrificial Lamb, we also see people from EVERY nation, tribe, people group and language present in this awesome picture of the Kingdom of Heaven.

Unfortunately, the church as a whole has fallen short of looking like the diverse, multi-cultural, multi-ethnic, multi-national and multi-lingual picture of Heaven that John so eloquently describes. It is because of this disparity that the National Diversity Team exists. Our call is to serve the body of Christ in the area of diversity so that the corporate earthly expression of the Kingdom of Heaven (the Church) will truly model the Kingdom that it was established to represent.

The National Diversity Team is made up of Christians from around the country that possess a heart for true diversity, as well as the desire to work with and serve others to see that true diversity happens. Our approach is two-fold:

1. Assemble, train and send National Diversity Team members from around the country to serve local house churches and networks in their area to model and live out true diversity intentionally.

2. Be a resource to local house churches and networks that wish to become truly diverse by serving and walking them through the process.

The house church movement has been cited as a movement that is bubbling underground and gaining great momentum. It is our prayer and desire to serve this movement now while it is still “underground,” so that when it rises to the surface for the entire world to see, it will look like the Kingdom of Heaven.

If you would like to join us in this work or simply find out more about the team, please contact us. We would love to hear from you. If your local church or network is interested in knowing more about how the National Diversity Team can be of service to you, please feel free to contact us as well. Thank you and we pray God’s blessings upon you.

Here to Serve,
Thomas Wynn, Jr.
The National Diversity Team

Send email to tlwynn@aol.com for more information about the National Diversity Team.
It’s not easy being simple.

O.k., you remember this one: K.I.S.S. (Keep it simple, stupid).

Eighteen months ago I wrote an article called Opposite World. It briefly told the story of The Well, a network of house churches in Orange County, California. A month earlier we had transitioned from a small traditional church to 3 simple churches in different locations. A year and a half later we have thirteen house churches. Each church’s weekly attendance averages anywhere from two to twenty-five. Our churches continue to multiply. The lost are coming to Christ. Many are coming back to church for the first time in years. This summer we baptized nine people in my backyard pool.

Good things are happening, but temptation is looming around us. As we do simple church the temptation is to complicate things. As the Israelites wandered in the wilderness, they complained when things got tough. They wanted to go back to Egypt. The fear of going forward was too much for them. The safety and predictability of slavery was more appealing than following God into the unknown.

As our network grows it is tempting to become complex. Following God into the wilderness of ambiguity seems irresponsible at times. I want to start McHouseChurch. I want a reproducible formula that I can put on every corner. It is tempting to want religion over relationship with the Almighty.

Nineteen months after leaving the building, The Well continues to be a network of "simple" churches. Most of the time, it is a beautiful, spontaneous thing. Every once in a while we muck it up with our own agendas. Listening to the Holy Spirit rather than the opinions of others continues to be the challenge. It is a life long learning process. The church is His, not ours.

It doesn’t have to be so complicated. Let’s Keep it Simple Saints

Ken Eastburn
Many are seeking a way to informally connect with other church planters and network leaders across North America (and beyond) for mutual encouragement, equipping and support. The North American Dawn ("DAWN" stands for Discipling A Whole Nation) team met recently to explore our contribution to this effort. Over the course of three days, the seven of us focused on listening to God and to each other in the context of personal sharing, eating, praying, going to a movie (The Guardian), laughing, eating, coaching, crying, discussing Scripture, eating, blessing each other, planning, etc. Here is what we believe the Spirit was saying to us:

The Dawn Leadership Team is a missionary team whose calling and delight is to pray for and serve other regional missionary teams throughout North America and beyond.

Team is built through intimacy with the Lord and with each other. The Lord has brought us together first to be friends, to listen to Jesus together, to love one another, to enjoy one another, to function together as a team, a family, a community. Then, we are to pray for and serve other teams throughout North America and beyond.

Missionary teams: By “missionary teams" we mean the same thing as “coaching networks." That is, a group of people called together by God to plant and nurture churches (vibrant families of Jesus) in a particular region or people group. Our initial goal is for 4,000 of these teams throughout North America.

Dawn is not the only “bus": We want to be clear that we believe there are many important ministries developing within the house church movement. We want to partner with those other ministries while maintaining the unique values God is calling us to. Working with Dawn is to decide to walk with a group of other church planters who have similar values and who are on a similar path.

Our role in helping to equip missionary teams: Our sense is that we are to offer a framework for those who are interested in functioning as a regional missionary team. This framework provides some structure within which the Holy Spirit can develop many unique expressions of church planting movements. This framework is both conceptual and relational, including:

A Dawn Primer: A collection of helpful papers and articles that have been written to assist with the foundational thoughts in developing a team and a network.

The Dawn website: A simple way of making the materials more accessible.

A National Dawn Conference: A three-day gathering of Dawn Associates

Regional Dawn Conferences: These will be small—no more than 30 people. The purpose is to train in values of “The Dawn Invitation" with special emphasis on experiencing simple church and coaching.

We are a community of learning and practice, where people can come to learn/experience in greater depth the values of simple church, coaching, etc.

The next step: If you are a church planter with a calling to a particular region (neighborhood, city, state, etc.) or people group and you would be interested in connecting with other church planters through Dawn Ministries, the next step for you is to read a paper called “The Dawn Invitation.”

John White
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“Medi-Share isn’t just an affordable way for Christians to share their medical expenses—it’s a real community of believers who are united in heart and service. We covenant to share our funds, and carry one another’s burdens. In our family, we sit around the dinner table

“What’s Medi-Share? It’s 50,000 Christians who want to pay your medical bills.”

with our kids and pray regularly for the folks on Medi-Share’s ‘Special Blessings’ list—families we’ve never even met—and that’s a ministry to our own children. I imagine the apostle Paul would have really appreciated Medi-Share. If you look at the principles he gave us, that’s what the body of Christ is all about—believers sharing with believers. Sure, the way Medi-Share serves us is wonderful. But the way we get to serve each other is fantastic.” —RANDY, self-employed

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