

LIFE Together



A House Church Training Manual



Table of Contents

1. Introduction	5
2. House Church Leaders and the Gospel	11
<i>A vision that compels us</i>	
<i>Values that propel us</i>	
Understanding our <i>vehicle</i>	
3. What is a House Church?	23
4. House Churches in Scripture	27
5. How to start a House Church	33
6. How to Build Community in Your House Church	39
7. How to Make Disciples in a House Church	47
8. How to Do Missional Events in a House Church	53
9. How to Give People a Heart for Mission in Your House Church	57
10. How to Avoid Boring House Church Meetings	63
11. How to Prepare Leaders in Your House Church	73
12. How to Direct People to the <i>Community</i> and <i>City</i> Church Meetings	81
13. The Gifts of the Spirit in a House Church	85
14. Taking the Lord's Supper in a House Church	89
15. How to Have Good Communication in a House Church	93
16. How to Reach Out to People in the Church	97
17. Working with Zone Leaders	99
<hr/>	
Appendix	103
<i>Observing the Lord's Supper</i> by Brian Anderson	105
<i>How to Properly Prepare a House Church Assistant</i> by Neil Silverberg	113
<i>How to Produce a Culture of Prayer in a House Church</i> by Neil Silverberg	119

Introduction

Welcome to *Life Together*. If you are reading this it is because you have been asked to serve as a House Church Leader at Trinity Community Church. It also means you have completed the syllabus *Together for the Gospel*, which explains the Gospel Trinity Community Church (TCC), believes and teaches. If you have not completed that study, you must first do so before going on to complete this. Talk to an elder or leader about how to start your study of *Together for the Gospel*. You must also have completed our Partners' Syllabus called *Partnering Together* and complete the process of becoming a TCC partner. Completing both of these are necessary to serve as a TCC house church leader.

TCC is a community of believers with a *vision* that compels us, *values* that propel us, and a *vehicle* that allows us to carry it out. The vehicle is the *house church; small groups of believers meeting in homes of our partners scattered throughout our region*. These groups form the basic Christian community of church life at TCC. Through the context of relationships formed in these house churches, believers grow together in their knowledge of the Gospel and begin to reach their neighborhoods and area with the good news. Yet this vehicle (house churches) is useless without a biblical *vision* and *values* to undergird it. Therefore, while this syllabus will focus largely on the mechanics of house churches (how they work and practical ways to achieve our goals), it is critical we first grasp the vision and values, which drive our small group ministry. *Effective house churches are not the result of learning to master practical skills* (though that is important), *but being*

Vision...

compels us

Values...

propel us

Vehicle...

carries it out!

God has made the Church a divine steward of the GOSPEL!

transformed by the Gospel which results in the creation of powerful Gospel communities who are passionate about seeing others come to know Jesus.

Since effective house church ministry is the result of Gospel transformation, what does Gospel transformation look like? We believe it encompasses the following three things:

Getting the Gospel Right

Before we can get the Gospel out or even be changed by it we have to get it *right*. So often the church spends its time devising ways to evangelize, all the while assuming that the message being shared is the biblical Gospel. Certainly, God can use people to share the Gospel who really don't know it themselves. Yet to insure maximum fruitfulness, it is vital that people are growing in an understanding of the Gospel before attempting to share it with others. The truth is, God often uses our attempts to reach out to others with the Gospel as a way of helping us to realize our own need to know it better.

The reason it is so important that we learn the Gospel is that God has made the Church a divine *steward* of the message. Ask people today what the most important thing about the local church is and they are bound to tell you it is how a church does children's ministry or its style of worship or attitude towards women in ministry. Few, if any, would say that the most important thing about a local church is how it stewards the Gospel, yet that is exactly what Scripture teaches. God has entrusted a message to us and we therefore must be careful not to tamper with it or pollute it with human ideas. *Therefore, we must always be growing in our understanding of it for this alone empowers us to share it with others.* This is clear in Colossians 1:5-6 where Paul speaks of the advancement of the Gospel through the believers at Colosse:

Of this you have heard before in the word of the truth, the gospel, which has come to you, as indeed in the whole world it is bearing fruit and increasing—as it also does among you, since the day you heard it and understood the grace of God in truth.
Colossians 1:5-6

Notice how Paul connects their growth in understanding the Gospel with its advancement throughout the earth. The Colossians were increasingly growing in their understanding of the grace of God and this accounts for the fact that they were fruitful.

Letting the Gospel In

By "letting the Gospel in" we mean that the Gospel begins a process in the life of a believer of total transformation. *If we want our Gospel to go out of us in power it must first come into us in power.* In Scripture, this is called sanctification. Before Isaiah was called to bring the word to his nation he had to first *see the Lord* so that his life might be totally transformed. Only then was he a fit vessel for God to use. In Scripture, the transformed life begins with 'conversion'—the call to repentance and faith. But conversion is the result of 'regeneration'—*a secret work that God does in a sinner whereby he causes them to come alive so that they are enabled to respond to God in repentance and faith.*

Getting the Gospel Out

By "getting the Gospel out" we mean that transformed believers are given both the privilege and the responsibility to share the Gospel with others. It is impossible to have been transformed by the Gospel and not be burdened to see others receive the word of his grace. This is commonly called *evangelism* and it is the ultimate way we bring glory to God. At TCC, we live to see others pass from death to life through the Gospel. Ultimately, our house churches exist to be missional communities reaching others with the Gospel. While at times this means that we might engage in missional events, the ultimate way we do this is by equipping God's people to use the *natural rhythms of life* to form relationships with those they are trying to reach.



House Church Leaders and the GOSPEL

The most important means of being a successful house church leader at TCC is by growing in your understanding of the Gospel, continually experiencing its transforming power, and having a great desire to see others transformed by it as well. Nothing can substitute for it. A house church leader must first be a person who has experienced the converting power of the Gospel, is presently growing in their understanding of the grace of God as taught in Scripture, and living out the Gospel through a transformed lifestyle. In our search for house church leaders, the first quality we are looking for are people who are being transformed by the Gospel and committed to doing everything they can to get it out.

A Vision That Compels Us

Trinity Community Church is a church with a vision to glorify God through faithfulness to the Gospel and its ideals with the result that we reach as many people we can with this glorious good news in our city, region, and world. We believe what Jesus said when he told his disciples, “By this my Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit and so prove to be my disciples” (John 15:8).

That is a clear statement of what we are after. We want to glorify the Father by being very fruitful in our personal lives and in the life of the

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community. In a sense, you could say that this is our “mission” statement. This must be the heart of every house church leader as well. In today’s world, many churches use small groups for various purposes, most often to care for their own members. At TCC, we pastor our church through house churches as well, but our *overarching purpose is that through Gospel understanding and transformation, we cooperate with our Master in reaping the harvest of souls he is calling to Himself*. One day when Jesus looked at the vast crowds around him he spoke to his disciples and made this observation:

The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few; therefore pray earnestly to the Lord of the harvest to send out into his harvest
Matthew 9:37-38

At TCC, we are committed to praying that the Lord of the Harvest would send us into his harvest fields. We believe that mission is not just something we do along with many other things, but the ultimate reason we are here. In John’s Gospel, Jesus made the statement to the twelve, “As you sent me into the world, so I have sent them into the world” (John 17:18). We believe that God has called us to be a missional church; first by holding firmly to the Gospel ourselves and then, by being empowered to share it with others.

While sometimes we reach out to others through various missional events as a church, we are really convinced that the best way is through believers reaching out to others through their normal course of life. Everyone has people in their personal sphere of influence that are potential candidates for the kingdom. At TCC, our goal is to *equip* people so that through confidence in the Gospel, they begin to form relationships with people and win them to the faith. Then, these equipped believers are used to disciple them into spiritual growth. So we do not use as a primary means of winning people the so-called “Attractional Model” (bring them to church to hear a gifted speaker). We are certainly not opposed to people hearing the Gospel through our corporate meetings, for we know that God certainly may use it. Yet, it is our passionate desire that God use every partner to win the lost and disciple them. That’s because we are convinced that it is God’s purpose that the five gifted ministries he has given to the body (Ephesians 4:11-

12) are God’s instruments to equip God’s people so that they can do the work of the ministry. That is exactly what the apostle says the effect of the five ministries operating is:

*And He gave some as apostles, some as prophets, some as evangelists, some as pastors and teachers for the **equipping** of the saints for the work of ministry, to the building up of the body of Christ.*
Ephesians 4:11-12

According to the apostle Paul, God gives these ministries for the specific purpose of equipping God’s people so that they are able to engage in ministry and build up the body. We usually think that those who hold fivefold office are the ones who do the work of the ministry, but Paul is actually saying that the five gifts *equip* the body to do the work of the ministry. That means that the “work of the ministry” for the most part, is that which is done “outside the walls.” This is a far cry from the traditional mentality, which view pastors and leaders as the ones in the ministry and the people serving only supportive roles to assist them. According to the biblical view, those in the fivefold ministry equip the saints so they can reach others. The focus changes from bringing people to leaders who can preach the Gospel to them to people engaging the culture by entering the lives of those in their immediate sphere of influence.

Values That Propel Us

Many churches have a biblical vision that compels them and spend the majority of their time creating structures (vehicles) to practically carry it out. This is a mistake in that they have skipped a vital part; *ensuring that there are biblical values to undergird it*. We can have a biblical vision and create structures to express it, *but unless there are biblical values driving us it cannot be carried out*. Biblical values are those realities which allow us to carry out the vision of furthering the kingdom of God in our city, region, and throughout the world.

There are three biblical values that should drive every local church. They are:

Notes

The five ministry gifts equip the body to do the work of the ministry.

- ◆ Community
- ◆ Discipleship
- ◆ Mission

Another way of saying this is that God has called us to *belong* to a community, *grow* as disciples, and *serve* the mission. Every believer in every local church should be involved on these three levels. Let us look at each of this carefully.

Belong to the Community:

When God saves people he doesn't save them merely as individual believers but brings them into a community. This is difficult for us to grasp in the West where we are taught to think of ourselves first as individuals and then as belonging to a group. But the Bible reverses this and tells us that before the foundation of the world, God had a community in mind.

If we want to understand community, we should look no further than the Godhead. It is as we understand the divine relationship, which exists between the members of the Godhead, we can grasp what God intends for the church. It is the way that each member of the Godhead relates to the other members that instructs us in how we are to relate to the other members of the community of the redeemed.

Community means that God has not called us to live isolated lives but lives deeply involved with others. Church life is not merely a matter of attending meetings but of "doing life" together with others. Some Christians spend their entire lives attending Christian meetings without ever forming deep relationships with other believers. It is no wonder that so many believers attend church for decades, yet remain the same.

To be an effective House Church Leader at TCC, a person must hold community as a deep value. That's because one of the goals each house church leader must seek to accomplish is to lead their group into

House Church Leaders must hold community as a deep value.

community. They do this not only through house church meetings, but by creating an atmosphere where deep relationships of transparency, accountability, and trust can be formed. Of course, the most important way that community is formed is as each person in each group grows in their knowledge of the Gospel, is continually changed by its power, and then is committed to working with others to get it out.

Each house church leader must be committed to building Christian community. That means that they must do certain things in their house church meetings that strengthen relationships. But the most important way leaders build community is by modeling it. They must be willing to be transparent in meetings if they expect others to be transparent. They must also be willing to form deep relationships with others if they expect others to do so as well. Later in this syllabus, we discuss practical ways for house church leaders to build community in their groups.

Grow as a disciple (discipleship)

Another value that a house church leader must hold is that of *discipleship*. This value has two aspects to it: first, that of personal growth and secondly, the need for each person to intentionally enter the lives of others to form deep relationships which God then uses to bring that person to salvation and/or maturity. This means that discipleship is God's normal way of bringing people to Christ and assisting believers in their growth towards maturity.

House churches are the way we do church as a community because we believe they provide the perfect atmosphere for believers to grow. Many churches believe that the best way for people to grow is by means of classroom instruction where believers are taught the fundamentals of the faith. While classes are a great way to supplement the process of discipleship, the best way for believers to grow is by being personally disciplined either by one person or within the context of a small group.

Each house church leader must first be persuaded that God wants to use the house church experience in each of the members' lives to cause

them to grow. This occurs as they learn the Gospel, apply it to their lives, and then work with others in the house church to share it with others by building relationships with unbelievers in their sphere of influence so as to share the Gospel with them. The house church leader must have as a stated goal that God has called this community (house church) together as a means of helping people grow in their knowledge of God and the Gospel. That means that the house church is more than a social group or even a Bible study or prayer meeting (though the people socialize, study the Bible, and pray). Rather, it is a community of people who are pursuing God together and allowing the Lord to use relationships to help each member of the house church become more like Jesus.

Serve the mission

The ultimate reason for community and discipleship is that *through them the house church can serve the mission of furthering the kingdom in our region*. Ultimately, community and discipleship exist so that God may be glorified and that we might make the Gospel known to more and more people.

One of the ways we see this is by what Jesus told his disciples when he first called them to leave their fishing boats in Galilee:

“Follow Me, and I will make you become fishers of men”

With these words they began their ministry. We notice that Jesus did not first call them to be church members but those who fish for others. He told them that if they followed Him fully, the one thing that would characterize them is that they have the same passion that was in Him would be in them!

Jesus made this even clearer in his high priestly prayer in John 17:18. Praying to the Father he said,

In the same way you gave me a mission in the world, I have given them a mission in the world.

Every believer has a part in this missional work. It is the reason for community and discipleship. After wanting to bring glory to God and remaining faithful to the Gospel, this desire to be missional must be established as the foundational reason for your existence. As a house church leader, this must be firmly established in your own heart first as you prepare yourself to lead your house church. You must see your house church as the means of answering our Lord’s prayer in Matthew 9:38: *“Pray earnestly to the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest.”*

To begin this missional journey as a house church leader, you must be honest about whether or not this burden is in your heart. As a house church leader, God has not just called you to *lead a Bible study or a care group*, but to lead God’s people into their *missional destiny*. Without this burden, your group will easily fall into familiar patterns that most small groups take. It is not that these are wrong, but without a strong missional focus these groups easily become self-centered and focused on their own needs.

Understanding Our Vehicle

TCC is a local church committed to the biblical values of community, discipleship, and mission. To accomplish this, we meet in three specific configurations, each one serving as a unique expression of our three values. They are:

House Church

basic Christian community

Community Church

corporate expression: 3-5 house churches

City Church

larger expression: 2 or more community churches

House Church Leaders are to lead God’s people into their missional destinies.

House Church

The **house church** is the basic Christian community; it serves as the foundation for everything else we do at TCC. House churches are not just Bible studies (though we study the Bible) or care groups (though we give care) but small, missional communities of believers which form strong relationships with others with a view of using those relationships to build relationships with unbelievers in order to gain opportunity to share the Gospel. House churches differ from typical small groups in several ways:

strong level of community (not driven by series or study materials but by belonging to one another)

used as a front door rather than closing the back door (most churches use small groups to close the back door)

submission to elders in teaching content (many forms of small groups operate independently of their local church in deciding what to teach)

strong level of pastoral care (many small groups do not provide a strong level of pastoral care)

focused on mission (many small groups are inwardly focused)

Community Church

Whenever we have 3-5 house churches in a given location we form a "Community Church" which is our *weekly corporate meeting*. These times of meeting include dynamic worship, teaching, fellowship and outreach. It is our goal to plant a Community Church in every area of our city, county, region and beyond. Our focus in these times is not on trying to be "attractual" to those who are not part of our community, but to come together for personal edification and to glorify the Lord. Yet at the

same time, we welcome those that God might attract to our corporate gatherings

City Church

All of our Community Churches come together regularly in what we call "City Church." In this way, we ensure that we maintain unity among our Community Churches. Because we do not see each other regularly in our Community Churches, we look forward to those times when we can get together for worship, sharing, teaching and vision casting. Sometimes we meet as a city church when we have a speaker that we have brought in to share with the entire community.



What is a House Church?

In order to be an effective House Church leader you must have a clear understanding of what a house church is. This is important because house churches are the basic community of TCC. First, let's look at what **a house church is not:**

A Bible Study

A house church is *not* a Bible study (though we study the Bible). In a Bible study the main focus is on helping people to understand the Bible. In a house church, our main focus is on building community.

The main focus of a house church is to build community.

A Worship Service

A house church is *not* a worship service. The most boring house church meetings are those that try to mimic a typical Sunday morning worship service.

A Prayer Meeting

A house church is not a prayer meeting (though the members pray)

Personal Platform for sharing personal stories and deriving attention (though an effective house church meeting includes much sharing among the members).

House Churches in Scripture

It is clear from the New Testament that believers in the first century met primarily in homes. Scanning the Pauline letters we see constant references to these communities meeting in believers' homes:

Greet Prisca and Aquila, my fellow workers in Christ Jesus. who risked their necks for my life, to whom not only I give thanks but all the churches of the Gentiles give thanks as well. Greet also the church in their house.

Rom. 16:3-5

Priscilla and Aquilla, together with the church in their house, send you hearty greetings in the Lord.

I Cor. 16:9

After she was baptized and her household as well, she urged us saying, 'If you have judged me to be faithful to the Lord, come to my house and stay.'

Acts 16:15

Notes

*Give my greetings to the brothers in Laodicea,
and to Nympha and the church in her house...
Col. 4:15*

We could add to that the example of the church in Jerusalem. Luke tells us that they met both in the temple regularly and in their homes where they took meals together:

*And day by day, attending the temple
together, and breaking bread in their homes.
Acts 2:46*

What is clear from all these references is that church life centered around the *homes* of believers. In the case of Jerusalem the church also met in the temple, no doubt to listen to apostolic teaching.

What is also clear is that these home meetings were not a support system for the larger church meeting but served as the basic Christian community where believers built strong relationships, practiced discipleship, and reached out to unbelievers.

Most believers, especially in the West, have grown up thinking of real church as occurring in a building on Sunday rather than as a community meeting in believers' homes. While we have made progress with the explosion of small group ministry of all sorts, most of these groups are viewed as supportive of the larger church service. *At TCC, we view the larger group meetings as supportive of the house churches.* The house church is the basic Christian community where community, discipleship, and mission are experienced.

So what is a house church? Here's a simple definition:

A house church is a group of believers who form the basic Christian community at TCC and who together seek out to live our three values of community, discipleship, and mission. The goal of each house church is

House meetings served as the basic Christian community where believers built strong relationships, practiced discipleship, and reached out to unbelievers.

to advance the kingdom in their area so that each house church grows through converts and eventually gives birth to a new house church.

It is important to realize therefore that a house church is not primarily a meeting. A house church will have meetings, but it is primarily a *community*. If a person seeking to lead a house church thinks of it primarily as a meeting than they will put the majority of their focus on the meeting. Meetings are important but a house church is not a meeting but a community that meets together at various times. Understanding this is critical to the success of a house church.



Notes

The goal of each house church is to advance the kingdom in their area so that each house church grows through converts and eventually gives birth to a new house church.

How to Start a House Church

How does a house church at TCC get started? First, a person needs to have given evidence that they have completed the following:

- ◆ Completed the *Together for the Gospel* course
- ◆ Completed the *Partnering Together* course and become a partner of TCC
- ◆ Completed the *Life Together* course
- ◆ Served as a house church assistant leader (this is not mandatory but should be the norm when possible)
- ◆ Proven that they have a stable marriage and family life and there are no besetting sins that they are dealing with
- ◆ Proven that they have the same biblical convictions and vision and values of TCC

At TCC, we prefer that house churches be led by married men (though we will also allow single men to lead at times). Women can lead house

churches that consist of women. A godly couple committed to this vision and values are best suited to lead a house church.

Host Homes

The first thing a house church leader should do is to wisely choose a host home that will serve as the central meeting place. Some house church leaders will prefer to host the meeting in their own home, but it is often better for a house church leader to not have to host the meeting himself. That takes the pressure off the house church leader to have to prepare his house and allow him/her to focus on preparing for the meeting.

In many ways, the persons hosting the house church meeting are as important as the house church leader. That's because they set the tone for how the meeting will be conducted and how welcome people are made to feel. For example, if a person hosting a house church is doing it out of a sense of duty rather than joyfully to serve God's people, the people coming to the house church will sense that and will be made to feel that their presence is an imposition. This is counter-productive to the purpose of the house church meeting. On the other hand, people specifically gifted with hospitality (Romans 12:13) make people feel welcome and set a tone of acceptance.

Because this is the case, it is best that those hosting the house church have the gift of hospitality when possible. But that is not always the case. Nevertheless, even people without this gift can create an hospitable atmosphere where others feel welcome. This is an absolute necessity if a house church is going to succeed. Therefore, a house church leader should inquire regarding the home and the persons that are hosting the house church. The house church leader should talk with the potential host as to what his or her expectations are. If the house church is meeting on a school night and the hosts are kindly asking that no one stay in the home beyond 10pm, their wishes should be respected. *But those things should be worked out between the house church leader and the host so that the leader can properly communicate it to the group.* It should be the leaders' responsibility to make sure the group understands this, not the host. We have seen too many hosts

burn out because their wishes were not respected and they ended up resenting ever agreeing to host the group.

A house church leader should never agree to permanently move a house church to a host home without first having a period of trial (at least three meetings) and dialoging with the potential hosts regarding their expectations. Also, a house church leader should first talk to a Zone Server about the potential hosts before committing the group to meet there. The Zone Server (or Elder) may know something about the people that a house church leader does not know. One house church moved to a particular home, only to discover there was constant fighting going on between the parents and a teenager creating tension in the home. But they had already committed to moving the house church there without having first assessed the situation. *Therefore, a leaders' assessment is critical before permanently committing to move a house church to a host home.*

One way to avoid burnout of hosts is to have at least two or three homes that the house church can move to periodically. It is better to have a host commit to the meeting for a few months than to commit to many years. This allows the burden to be shared and reduces the stress on one person or family hosting the meeting.

Meeting Times

When a house church meets is totally dependent on the people who make up that house church. Typically, a house church fares better when it is not held on a school night (although we have known house churches that did well on school nights). A house church leader should first talk with the host to ascertain what the best time is for them, since they have been gracious enough to open their home. Also, meeting times should be ascertained by talking to the people in the group as well as considering the people the house church is trying to reach.

How long a house church meeting is should also be determined by various factors (age of people in the group, the night it is meeting, host home specifics, etc.). The key is to communicate to the hosts and to key people in the group. A house church leader may decide that he or she likes long meetings that last several hours. But is that best for the group and the

How to Build Community in Your Group

If you don't start right you won't finish right. That is true in constructing a building and it is also true in building a house church. In erecting a building, it is critical the foundation be right or else the entire edifice will be skewed. So also, if the foundation is not properly laid in your house church in the beginning, you may end up with a meeting where individuals come to get their spiritual needs met rather than a family that is being built together by the Spirit. So it is vital a house church start on the right footing from the outset.

What is the foundation that must be carefully laid in the beginning of a house church? It is the call, through the Gospel, for the people in your house church to experience *community*, which is the Spirit's gift to the church. Community is defined as the *willingness of each member to go beyond the superficial in their relationships with others*. The goal of the house church is to form Gospel relationships with other believers that God can use to affirm the reality of his kingdom. Jesus said that it was our love for one another that is the greatest calling card for the kingdom (John 13:35). So community that is formed by the Gospel comes when the members begin to manifest that transparency which opens up hearts and gives people a foretaste of heaven.

Notes

How do house church leaders lead the people in their group into community? Here are some key things that God can use to establish your group as a loving community, serving one another and furthering the kingdom together:

Make the house church about relationships, not just meetings.

One of the surest ways to stifle community is by putting all of the emphasis on the house church meeting rather than on forming relationships. In this regard, the meeting becomes much like the Sunday corporate gathering where people come just to hear and receive while remaining strangers to others. The way to counter that is not by diminishing the importance of the meeting but by encouraging the members to form relationships outside of the meeting.

That is one of the reasons that most house churches meet only bi-weekly. It allows for people in the house church to fellowship *outside of the meetings*, thus forming deeper bonds of relationships. The house church leader must lead the way in this regard by opening up his home to inviting others in the group for meals and evenings of fellowship. **One important way of doing that is by encouraging men and women in the group to meet separately on the off weeks for times of fellowship and amusements.** Men have formed deep bonds with other men by sharing in sporting events or going to a movie together. Women have developed ties by eating together with other women or having women come to their own homes.

Wise house church leaders will use the weeks when their group is not meeting to build these strong bonds, not only with believers but in learning to relate to unbelievers as well. Nothing strengthens the bonds of community more than when believers are working together to hold out the word of life to the people of their own community (see Philippians 2). House church leaders might consider how they can, along with others in the group, form relationships with those not yet saved.

Build strong bonds with people during the weeks when you do not meet.

Model Transparency

One important way for leaders to form community in their group is by modeling transparency so that others begin to open up their lives as well. Transparency is the willingness to be known by others without any airs, fronts, or masks. It is absolutely necessary if community is to be experienced. Simply stated, it is impossible to have real fellowship with others who are hiding behind walls and masking how they really feel.

The leader sets the tone for this by modeling transparency. This does not mean a leader says everything he feels or shares things unwisely. But it does mean that he is open and honest about his own struggles and the things he has difficulty with. In a word, an effective house church leader is a person who has come to know their own sinfulness and is actively pursuing sanctification. And because they are coming to know how deeply flawed they are, they have no need to hide themselves from others. That is the basis for transparency.

The effective house church leader models this transparency in the way he leads the house church meeting. He leads with sensitivity, compassion, and willingness to let people into his heart. When a leader comes off as being approachable and vulnerable, it sets people at ease and lets them know that this (the house church) is a safe place for them to be transparent as well. It is amazing how a leader can establish this tone by his own willingness to be transparent.

Use Ice-Breakers

One way that is useful to build community in your group is by the use of good icebreakers to open up meetings. Icebreakers are questions that the leader asks of the group that are specifically designed to reveal something about each person in the group. For example, a leader might ask people in the group to share a job they have had in the past that others would be surprised at. Or perhaps the group is asked to share something about their family background and the home they grew up in. These questions have an objective: to help the members of the group to come to more fully be acquainted with each person in the group.

Icebreakers are questions specifically designed to reveal something about each person in the group.

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Icebreakers should be used largely as a way of opening meetings. By using them at the beginning, a leader can accomplish two things. First, it makes people aware of those who are in the meeting. The most effective house church meetings begin by helping the members become sensitive to who is in the meeting. House church meetings should never mimic corporate meetings which begin without a focus on who is present. House church meetings that are most successful begin by establishing a sensitivity to who is present. That is why icebreakers are so useful.

A leader should be sensitive to the fact that icebreakers have the potential to expose pain in a person's life. Asking people, for example, to share their family history may be difficult for some to do without a release of emotion. A skilled leader will sense when a person is uncomfortable with a question and seek to move on so that person does not feel pressure to share. It often is the case that, as a person becomes comfortable with others, they find it easier to answer a question that is personal. So each leader should be sensitive to the people in his group and never pressure someone to share before they are comfortable or ready.

It is probably wise to begin with icebreakers that are not too probing at the beginning of the life of a house church. As the group grows in relationship a leader can progressively use icebreakers that will be more penetrating. But remember, icebreakers should be fun and not heavy! Using icebreakers properly does exactly that—it breaks the ice so that people begin to open up and share their lives with one another. In time, these tools make it easier for people to become acquainted with the people in their group.

Icebreakers do not have to be used every week but they really are important at the beginning of a new house church. But one other important thing that a house church leader must not forget is to introduce new people at the beginning of each house church meeting. Some leaders ignore new people through an entire meeting or introduce them only at the end. It is important to introduce new people at the beginning of a house church meeting, especially before an icebreaker. That makes it easier for them to participate with the others in the icebreaker at the start of the meeting.

Sometimes a leader will discern that there are unbelievers present in a house church meeting and will decide to forego the icebreaker or perhaps change it to a more appropriate one. When that occurs it is fine. Icebreakers are not always necessary but is a tool that we can use or forego as we find necessary. And it is not the only tool in a leader's arsenal. Therefore, a leader should seek to use his tools wisely and never feel forced.

Use the Off Weeks for “Discipling” Triads

A wise leader will use the off weeks (weeks when there is no meeting) for the purpose of discipleship. We have found that the best discipling units are those “triads:” groups of three people meeting together regularly for the purpose of spurring one another one towards faith and good deeds. These groups can consist of a mature believer with two newer believers or even two mature believers meeting with a new convert or someone less mature.

The reason triads seem to work better than groups of twos is that in one on one discipling relationships, it tends to have the feel of one person teaching another, whereas in triads, there is more the feeling of a group gathering to be mutually edified. Even the one who is the most mature in a triad comes to receive from the others. So the main benefit of a triad is that it seems more conducive to group sharing where each person contributes to the others.

Encourage every person in your house church, regardless of their maturity, to be part of a discipling triad, but especially those who are new in the faith and/or are struggling to live the Christian life. These discipling units are a powerful means of holding other believers accountable and providing transparency in relationships. Community is a major means of attaining spiritual growth and these discipling triads go a long way to providing an atmosphere for believers to grow.



How to Make Disciples in your Group

House churches are the perfect atmosphere for making disciples due to the intimacy of relationships it affords. But just having a house church where people are coming to a meeting does not at all guarantee that you are making disciples. Disciples are made primarily through relationships, not meetings (though meetings are certainly a catalyst for discipleship as they provide an atmosphere by which we are continually hearing the Gospel).

A house church leader must not think that his primary role is the facilitating of a meeting (though leading the meeting is important). If the people in your house church are committed to a meeting but have little relationship or discipleship initiative you really don't have a house church, but a Bible study or fellowship group. Community (ever increasing relationships of transparency and accountability in love) and discipleship (the intentional pouring of ourselves in others) are the primary means of moving a group from a Bible study or fellowship group to a house church.

The goal is to convince the people in your group that they are all called to be involved in discipleship. It is not just leaders who are to be involved in discipling others. Jesus has called us to "make disciples" and he expects

Disciples are made primarily through relationships.

**Discipleship
begins as we form
relationships with
unbelievers.**

us to do that in the normal course of our lives. In the English translation of the Great Commission, Jesus tells the disciples that they must “Go therefore, and make disciples of all nations.” Traditionally, the Church has focused on the “going,” placing the emphasis on missionaries who go to other parts of the world. But the verb “go” is not the imperative verb in the sentence but the verb “make” is. It could read, “while you are going, make disciples.” While this first and foremost pertains to the sending of the twelve, it applies secondarily to every disciple after them. We are called to make disciples “while we are going.” “Going where” you might ask? Going wherever we go in the normal course of our lives. Whether we are going to the store or going to work or going to school, there are people who God puts in our path that we may have opportunity to disciple.

Viewed in this light, it is clear that discipleship begins as we form relationships with unbelievers. Most believers think of discipleship primarily as the means of helping believers to grow. That is certainly a valid expression of it, but it is not limited to that. When Jesus first met a few of his early disciples (see John 1:33-51), He invited them to stay with him. Truth be told, they were disciples before they believed! (see John 2:11). So it is very important for you as a leader to help those in your group to recognize that discipleship starts by first entering the lives of unbelievers and building relationships with them so that we can have opportunity for Gospel sharing.

This will be a great challenge to your group. Most believers have been taught that they should stay away from relationship with unbelievers unless it is to invite them to Church or to a meeting. Unbelievers often feel as if Christians have no real interest in them as people and therefore have resisted the message. But if we are to make disciples we must settle in our hearts that God has called us to relate to people and that the building of those relationships are part of discipling. Of course, it is not just relating to them but preaching the Gospel to them that we are able to make disciples. Still, we are to do that from the standpoint of having first related to them as unique persons.

Effective house church leaders will help the members of their group to realize that God has called them to enter the lives of others and build relationships with them. There are exceptions to this, of course. It is not

wise to encourage new believers who came from addictive backgrounds to try to reach their friends unaided by other believers who are stronger. But wise house church leaders will use the relationships these believers have with their friends to build relationships with them if possible. These are golden opportunities to enter lives of these believers. When a new believer gets baptized use that as an occasion to encourage him or her to invite their friends to see them baptized. Encourage the members of your house church to pray that God might allow them to enter the live of those already in their sphere of influence.

Of course, new believers in the group should be disciplined by more mature believers. Effective house church leaders will help these mature believers to build relationships with those in the group who need to be disciplined. This can be done by using the discipling triads (see previous section), but this should not exclude one on one relationships when triads are not possible. But these believers should learn to seek out these people and enter relationship with them. They must not think that discipleship occurs in a meeting only. They must be prepared to enter the lives of those they are discipling and let them enter their lives. There is a great difference between learning in a classroom atmosphere and learning in the context of a loving relationship who is modeling what is taught.



The Role of Missional Events

Most of the increase in your house church should come from the relationship the members of your house church have with unbelievers. But that should not rule out using certain occasions for having special missional events. Jesus both entered the lives of people individually as well as preached to multitudes at special times. A wise house church leader will use both of these missional means to reach unbelievers.

Holidays are a great time for a house church to have a special outreach. These occasions do not have to be well planned meetings but a time when people from the neighborhood can be invited for food and fellowship. Sometimes, it can be effective at such outreaches to have a person give their personal testimony. *Wise house church leaders will use holidays as a special time of reaching out to their neighborhoods. Halloween, Christmas and the Fourth of July are great times for inviting people to special house church events.*

Such times should be well prepared if they are to be effective. The most important way to prepare for house church outreaches (as well as

How to Give People a Heart for Mission in Your House Church

House church leaders make a fatal mistake if they focus only on the technical aspects of outreach and don't address the heart of their people. Mission begins not with a plan but with the heart of God gripping God's people as the heart of Paul did for the lost sheep of the house of Israel (see Romans 9:1-2). Mission must begin in the heart and that means that only as the Gospel changes the heart can our people be effective in mission.

That does not mean that house church leaders should succumb to the notion that people can't share the Gospel until they are well taught the Gospel. The best atmosphere for people to grow in their ability to advance God's kingdom is both where they are properly being instructed in Gospel doctrine as well as actively involved in missional work. As they learn the Gospel, it should grow into an increased burden to see the lost won. And the more they are actively involved in reaching the lost, the more it illuminates our need of the grace of the Gospel. The two work hand in hand and should not be viewed adversely.

Mission begins with the heart of God gripping God's people for lost sheep.

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A leader who carries a real burden for souls is a powerful means of transferring that burden to others.

An effective house church leader must model this heart for mission. It begins with praying for a heart to see people converted and brought into the kingdom. House church leaders that don't have this heart should pray that they get it (Matthew 9:35-38). The Lord is willing and able to change our hearts so that we join him in "seeking and saving that which is lost." It is impossible to lead people into this passion if the one leading does not have it. Two things contribute to this passion. First and foremost, a knowledge of the "lostness" of those around Him was the foundation of the compassion which Jesus demonstrated for others, and it will be the same for us as well. But secondly, an awareness that God is actually calling some of these sinners to Himself should give us confidence that the Gospel will work when we proclaim it to others.

A house church leader should make the drawing of sinners to God a matter of constant prayer, not only in his personal life but in his prayer in the group as well. If a leader gives the impression that he is fine with those who are coming and exhibits no burden for the lost it is little wonder that those in the group are not concerned with the lost. But burden is transferable. A leader who carries a real burden for souls is a powerful means of transferring that burden to others.

A wise leader will speak to the group often about people in their sphere of influence so that the group might pray for them. This reminds the group that this house church is not just for believers but for reaching the lost. Perhaps the group can draw up a list of people that they can be praying for each time they meet and that can be passed around to the entire group. This is a sure way to keep the group outwardly focused.

Another thing that a wise leader will do is to constantly refer to the ministry of Jesus in his/her teaching and ministry. Peter stated that "*God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and power and He went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil*" (Acts 10:38). The ministry of Jesus is all about 'mission.' In the Message paraphrase John 17:17 reads, "*In the same way that you gave me a mission in the world, I give them a mission in the world.*" Notice that at the beginning of his training of the twelve (Mark 1:17) and at the end (John 17:18) he speaks

to them about mission. He essentially is telling them that if they follow him, the same passion that He had for mission will be in them.

None of this can be faked. As a house church leader, you must have a genuine desire and burden from the Lord that people be saved. The prayer of Rachel must be uttered by you at all times: "Give me children or I will die" (Genesis 30:1). People with that kind of burden will easily impart it to others.



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The ministry of Jesus is all about MISSION!

How to Avoid Boring House Church Meetings

We have all been to house church meetings that were indescribable and that would keep you coming back for more. On the other hand, we have all been to meetings that were so boring, you prayed for the ground to open up and swallow you. Why the difference? Here are some of the reasons a house church meeting is boring and fails to meet the purpose for which people are gathered:

House church meeting tries to be a mini-Sunday morning

Nothing is worse than a house church meeting that masquerades as a mini-corporate service. There is a song service followed by a message (40 minutes) in which one person teaches followed by prayer requests. While that serves well in larger corporate meetings, it will absolutely kill a house church meeting. House church leaders must realize that that is not the goal for a successful house church meeting.

House church leader has not prepared well

Another reason a meeting is boring is that the house church leader has failed to prepare properly. Instead of thinking deeply about a penetrating Icebreaker question and good insight into the sermon gained by taking time to read the passage and read through the notes, the leader doesn't think about it through the week and hurriedly prepares something in his mind in the car on the way to the meeting. To lead properly a person must be well-prepared. Boring meetings sometimes occur because leaders don't take proper time to be prepared. God may change everything when a leader gets there but it is always important for the leader to be prepared for how he/she expects the meeting to flow.

Lack of organic flow to the meeting

At first, this might seem like a contradiction of the previous point but actually it's not. It is the well-prepared leader who is in best position to flow with the Spirit of God in a meeting. By 'organic flow' we are referring to *the ability of a leader to make adjustments* to the way a meeting is going as well as lead a meeting, even that is well structured, without giving the appearance of being rigid. Leaders who are able to flow give the appearance that a meeting is not structured when it is.

Lack of focus on people

This is a common mistake among house church leaders, especially those who are gifted in teaching. The meeting is focused largely on teaching so that it becomes a Bible study. Remember, house churches study the Bible but a house church meeting is not a Bible study. Rather, it is a gathering of saints who, among other things, study the Bible. By this, we are not demeaning the Bible. We simply want to make the distinction between a Bible study and a house church meeting.

Some house church leaders fail to recognize and introduce new people to the group. They open the meeting in prayer and plunge

immediately into the study. This reveals a leader who is not really focused on people but on teaching. The Word of God is critical to the success of a meeting but to build a successful house church it is imperative that leaders focus on the people present. Community is essential to the success of a house church.

Lack of start and end time

Some meetings are boring because they have neither a starting time or an ending time. We are not referring to those exceptions when God is doing something extraordinary but to the fact that *leaders fail to start and end on time*. People become weary because the meeting doesn't end and they don't know when they are going to get home.

Lack of opportunity to share

Some meetings are boring because house church leaders or a few key people monopolize the time and do all the talking. There is no room for anyone else to share. This is counterproductive to a healthy meeting. A leader must know that the more people who share in the meeting the livelier the meeting will potentially be. House church leaders should strive for I Corinthians 14:26 to be the goal for every meeting. There are differing gifts that can be brought to a meeting; a well-trained house church leader will seek to draw them out.

To accomplish this, leaders need great skill in leading meetings. First of all, they must be careful not to monopolize the meeting. This is especially the case when it comes to leading teaching discussion in the meeting. Some leaders teach for forty five minutes and then ask the people if there are any questions. This is sure to shut down the group. Instead, the leader needs to learn how to do 'spot' teaching. This is where the leader teaches some and then asks really insightful questions to draw people out. Sometimes, he or she should ask someone a question to draw them out (but never in a pressured way so the person feels embarrassed if they don't know the answer). When the leader asks the group a question he or she should never answer it themselves quickly but give people time to think about it. Leaders need to not feel awkward about those moments

***Draw people
into the
conversation.***

of silence when people are thinking the answer. Some leaders cringe at that time and answer their own question to quickly.

Lack of Ice-breaker to open meeting

One important way to open a house church meeting is by using an Ice-breaker question at the beginning. This can be a light question (name one good thing that happened to you this week) or else something deeper (what was your greatest challenge this week). Sometimes the Ice-breaker will be introducing someone new to the group and letting them take a short time to tell the group about themselves. As a group grows together in community Ice-breaker questions can naturally grow deeper.

One purpose of the Ice-breaker question is to get the focus on who is present in the meeting. *The key to a successful meeting is that the people are growing deeper in their relationship to one another.* Whereas it would be impossible to do that in a larger corporate meeting it is essential in a house church meeting. That means a leader should always introduce new people up front as well as draw out of people in the group testimonies that will encourage everyone.

Ice-breaker should include (not always) eating together before the meeting (see section on Lord's Supper). Eating a meal together at the beginning helps provide a bridge between peoples' busy week and the meeting itself. Sometimes the group will eat together and then go right into the meeting without an Ice-breaker question. In this case, the meal serves as the Ice-breaker in that it gives people opportunity to wind down from a busy week.

Lack of restraint on people who talk to much

One thing that is certain to kill a meeting is the person who uses any and every occasion to talk in a meeting. In most meetings you will have three types of people: those who love to talk, those who talk occasionally and when they do usually have good things to say, and those who never talk. The goal is to get the people on the outside core (those who talk to much and those who never talk) to meet in the

middle. It takes great skill to lead a meeting in such a way as to not allow over-talkative people to manipulate the entire meeting and to draw out those who almost never share.

A leader must take the lead to let that happen. At times he or she will have to gently summarize what a person is saying who loves to talk by saying something like, "So what you learned through this experience is that God is just as much concerned with *how* we say something as He is in *what* we are saying?" By taking the lead you are signaling to the person who was talking to be more sensitive not to monopolize the time while still being respectful to what they have to say.

Teaching Time

Most house church meetings will have a time of teaching and interacting around the Word of God. Sometimes house churches are studying the sermons from the Community Church meetings and at other times they are studying a book of the Bible or teaching material provided by the elders. This is an important time of every gathering. Since we believe that the Gospel is the most important thing in the life of the Church this time of gathering around God's Word cannot be overestimated.

As a house church leader, you cannot lead a house church effectively unless you are committed to personal devotion to God's Word. If you aren't committed to learning Scripture and just review a teaching a few minutes before a house church, is it any wonder that the people in your house church will not be excited about learning God's Word? One of the goals of every house church leader should be helping the people in the group grow in their knowledge of God's Word. But this is not a matter of talking about it—*a house church leader has to live what he expects others to be.*

The golden rule of the teaching time is not to make it a sermon. The house church leader must present a summary of the portion of Scripture being taught or the lesson for that meeting. The best term to describe this is "Interactive Teaching." This is teaching the session in such a way that you invite people to interact around the material. In corporate meetings where

Notes

there are several hundred gathered, this is impossible (unless we want to meet for hours). *But in a house church the more people gather around God's Word and interact around it the better.*

A house church meeting is boring when the leader gives a mini-sermon and the rest sit and listen. But when a leader does so-called 'spot-teaching' which summarizes the sermon or lesson and then asks good questions so as to draw out those in the group, the teaching time is successful. Here are some things to avoid if you want to insure that the teaching time is not boring:

-Don't ask questions before you have summarized the teaching. This is a version of the proverbial 'what did you get out of the passage' that can easily lead to a 'common sharing of ignorance.' If you want people to respond to the teaching, give them some substance. If we are doing sermon study, each house church leader gets a copy of the sermon with questions provided. Use them.

-Don't give a sermon and then dismiss the group or go to prayer. This is akin to making the group a mini Sunday morning. Boring! The key to a powerful house church meeting is to get people interacting through the ice-breaker, teaching time, and ministry.

-Don't ask a question and then quickly answer yourself without giving people a chance to respond. Some house church leaders ask a question and are quick to respond if there is even a second of silence.

-Don't be afraid to call on others to answer without applying pressure. It is okay to seek to draw out others to answer but never seek to pressure them. If a person hesitates, move on. Never make them feel like they are stupid for not answering.

Ministry Time

We define this part of the house church meeting as 'ministry time.' We mean by that both ministry to the Lord (prayer and worship) and ministry to others (through the gifts of the Spirit and praying for others). A meeting is a time when saints both minister to the Lord and to others.

We strongly encourage you not to ask for prayer requests at the end of a house church meeting. Rather, teach the people in your group

Notes

to lead in prayer as the Spirit gives them utterance. When you ask for prayer requests it ceases to be spontaneous and makes the meeting more like a corporate meeting than a house church. Teach people to respond to the Lord during a meeting rather than waiting to be led by a leader to respond. This part of the meeting should take I Corinthians 14:26 as its goal. Paul envisions all of the parts of the body working and contributing to the meeting. At times, entire house church meetings can be a spontaneous flow in which the members are sharing the gifts and things that God has given them with one another.

Teach the people in your group to lead out in prayer as they are directed so that the others might follow. This guarantees a better flow at the end of the meeting (or whenever the ministry time occurs). One goal of the meeting is to teach people to directly respond to the Lord rather than when prompted by leaders. Very few people have learned to flow this way in a meeting. The more *organic* your house church is the better it will be. Again, you do not want to make the meeting so rigid that it resembles a large, impersonal corporate meeting. Aim at making your house church meeting to resemble Paul's description of a meeting in I Corinthians 14:26.

Since Paul lays special emphasis on prophecy in meetings (I Corinthians 14:1), the members of a house church should be encouraged in the use of that gift. But it is vital that we don't buy into the idea that prophecy is speaking in the first person for God! It is not, and the members of the house church should be taught that. *To 'prophecy' is to speak forth a revelation that God has given a person*, but the person delivering it does not have to speak in the first person. Rather, he or she should be encouraged to simply share what God has given them.

Sometimes a word of knowledge or prophetic utterance opens the door for ministry to a person. This should be done sensitively as to this can be very personal. Always be aware of whether or not a person wants to receive prayer or ministry and this should never be forced. At other times a person may ask for prayer in a group. It should be up to the discretion of the leader as to whether or not ministry to that person is timely. Sometimes a leader may ask a person to wait on that because of a sense that God is doing something else.

***The more organic
your house church
the better it will be.***

How To Prepare Leaders in a House Church

One of the most important needs of a healthy and growing house church is for a house church leader to give adequate time to the preparation of a future house church leader. This is critical part of the process, since the goal of every house church is to reach a certain size and give birth to a new house church. Only as this process is continually occurring can we insure that there are an adequate number of house churches at TCC to minister to the people. If the goal is to be continually producing new house churches than the preparation of new leaders is critical to that process.

Therefore, every leader should make it a matter of urgent prayer that God would given them an *assistant*—a person to work alongside them that they can train to eventually become a house church leader. This assistant should get all of the training they need by working in the house church alongside the leader (besides those specific times of house church leader training provided by the pastors and Zone Leaders at TCC). It is the responsibility of the house church leader to train that person adequately so that when the group divides, there is a person ready to assume the leadership of the new group.

There are four specific phases to properly prepare a house church assistant. The four phases are:

- ◆ Analyzing
- ◆ Training
- ◆ Equipping
- ◆ Releasing

Let's look carefully at each of these.

Analyzing

The first step is to properly *choose* an assistant. How do you do this? First and foremost, the house church leader should be committed to prayer that God would raise up that person. This is in accordance with what our Lord said ("pray the Lord of the harvest to send out workers into his harvest"). This work is so important that it should not be entrusted to someone carelessly but be given to a person who truly has a heart for it. It must be someone who has a solid relationship with God, cares deeply about God's people, and desires to serve the Lord by giving themselves to the people in the group. Therefore, the house church leader should be praying from the inception of the group that God would raise up such a person with the heart burden to do it. The simple truth is, we need workers whom God has called to this important task.

Another thing a leader should do while analyzing the people in the group for a potential assistant is to delegate tasks to people in order to discover who has a heart for this work. Not only will this take the burden off the leader to have to do everything, it complies with a principle found in God's Word regarding deacons that they "first be tested" before they are set into that position" (1 Tim. 3:10). Simple tasks like asking a person to call others who have missed meetings, giving rides to people, bringing snacks, leading in the Lord's Supper, praying with members, etc. are important ways of discovering who really wants to serve. The principle is simple—*always develop the servant heart of a potential leader before giving them any leadership responsibilities.*

As you analyze the people in the group for a potential assistant, look for those who have a stable walk with the Lord. Also, it should be someone whose family life is in order. It goes without saying that the person must be committed to the house church and is dependable. You do not want an assistant that you cannot depend on to come to meetings and carry out instructions.

This period of analyzing is important. If you begin to feel that you might have a candidate for potential leadership don't immediately talk to that person. Rather, continue to pray and ask God to put this desire on their heart as well.

Training

Once you begin to feel like you might have a person in mind as a potential assistant, schedule a time to talk it over with your Zone Leader. This is an important step. It is possible that a Zone Leader has had a relationship with the person and can shed valuable light. Perhaps that person is struggling with some things you are not aware of. The Zone Leader will stand with you in prayer about the possibility of that person serving as a house church assistant.

Up till this point, you should not have spoken to the potential candidate about their being a possible assistant. You have simply prayed, carefully observed them in the meetings, delegated tasks to them, and spoken to your Zone Leader about that person. At this point, if the person demonstrates a stable walk with the Lord, seems committed to the group, and exhibits a burden for people and a desire to serve, speak again to your Zone Leader about selecting that person as an assistant. If the Zone Leader approves, you should then approach the person and ask them to prayerfully consider being an assistant leader. You should explain to them what this entails, making sure they understand that the goal is to eventually birth a new group which they will lead. A person who desires to be a permanent assistant should not be chosen (there are no permanent assistants). Give them a space of time (a week or two) to prayerfully consider it and ask them to get back to you in that time period with their answer.

If the person accepts the position, notify the group at the next meeting. At this point, the training of the person to be a should begin.

Remember, there should not be any permanent assistants since the goal for every group is to grow to the point where a new group is birthed. So every assistant leader is really a house church leader in training. How then do you train that person to be a house church leader?

First, make sure they obtain this *Life Together* Notebook and material from TCC from the previous House Church Leaders' Training Sessions. The person should go through the material so that they are on the same page with the direction of the church.

Also, a leader should plan times to get together with the assistant to talk about the group and to strategize. This becomes even more important when the group is in the final stage before dividing. That means that the leader and assistant need to have a healthy relationship so that they enjoy spending time together. This makes working together so much easier. One of the things that the leader needs to do to provide training for the assistant is to talk about previous meetings and discuss how they can be improved. Also, the leader should discuss the various needs of the people in the group so that the assistant can learn to really care for the people. Remember, you are not just training a person to lead a meeting but to serve God's people and give them pastoral care. That doesn't mean that you are preparing a pastor. But house church leaders at TCC are called to provide pastoral care for people.

Equipping

As the group grows and passes through various stages, a leader's task of preparing another leader transitions from *training* to *equipping*. In the Training phase you want to impart to the assistant the heart of a shepherd so that they really care for the people (you must model this if you want to see it in others). In the Equipping phase, you want to prepare the assistant to learn how to properly lead meetings as well as the other skills necessary for being an effective leader. It might be easier to say that the Training phase is intended to give them the heart, while the Equipping phase is to give them the skills necessary to be a success.

During this phase of an assistant's learning, the leader should purposely ask him or her to lead some of the house church meetings. This is essential if that person is going to be equipped to lead meetings in the future after the group divides. Equipping does not occur by

watching others, but by doing. So the house church leader must have some experience leading a meeting. At these times, the leader should observe the leadership skills of the assistant and be prepared to offer any insights that will make that person better equipped to lead a house church meeting.

Another thing that can be delegated to an assistant during this period is to lead special outreaches and other things the group has planned. This is a good opportunity to equip them further. Experience proves that a leader who does not give an assistant an opportunity to lead will not produce an effective leader who leads with confidence. One of the hesitations leaders have in allowing others to lead is the fear that they might not do it well. But this must be overcome. Leaders do not develop in a vacuum; they need actual leadership experience in order to grow and be better equipped.

Releasing

This final phase pertains to those last few weeks before a house church divides. It is essentially that time when the identity of the new group is formed within the existing house church and the new leader is released. A three or four week period to do this properly is best. One way to accomplish this is for the house church to divide within the house they are in so that the new group's identity is formed around the new leader. By allowing the two groups to meet together for a few weeks this allows the leader to be firmly in place as well as cementing the group together.

This is a time when the house church leader needs to fully release the new group and new leader with full confidence. The group should pray together for the success of the new group. During these weeks, all of the final preparations (where the new group will meet, what time, interview with new hosts, etc.) should be fully solidified.

The house church should celebrate when the time comes to divide. This is a joyous occasion (though it is also somewhat sad) in that the group has reached its goal. A new group means that more people can potentially be won for the kingdom of God and more of God's people can be potentially cared for. So it is vital that the house church leader and the assistant exude confidence that this is what the group has been working towards all along. It should not be entered reluctantly, but with absolute confidence that the Lord has prepared the group for this moment.

How To Direct People to the Community and City Church Meetings

In time, many new people may be added to a house church. Some of them will be freshly won from the kingdom of darkness. The people in the house church will become a person's new family members. They will love him/her, disciple, and walk with them until they are established in their new faith.

Part of their growth is making sure they are eventually connected to the TCC Community Church and City Church meetings. Each member of the house church should realize that they are part of something larger than the particular house church they are part of. The Community Church meeting is that weekly time on the Lord's Day when we gather to worship through song and listening to God's Word. The City Church meeting quarterly are those times when all of our Community Church meetings come together to celebrate what God is doing, hear God's Word and receive fresh direction.

The Gifts of the Spirit in a House Church

Trinity Community Church considers itself to be “Charismatic” in the biblical sense. The word *Charismatic* is derived from the root Greek word *charisma* which means “a free favor” or “free gift.” Used in the NT, the term often describes various spiritual endowments which each believer receives at the new birth. While some churches teach that these endowments vanished from the Church after the Apostolic Age, we at TCC believe they are still available to every believer and are an important way of building up the body of Christ.

Paul describes vividly the various manifestations which the Spirit produces in the body of Christ (I Corinthians 12). He uses the recurring phrase “to each one” (I Cor. 12:7) to signal that these are not gifts that only leaders operate in but the normal life of the Church. Paul envisions the body of Christ functioning by each one contributing through their unique giftedness. In I Corinthians 12:7, Paul reminds them that as the Spirit manifests through the exercise of the gifts of each one, all are mutually benefitted (“for the common good”).

House churches are an excellent setting for the exercise of spiritual gifts. In larger corporate meetings (Community Church and City Church) it is difficult for every member to exercise spiritual gifts because of the nature of the meeting. But we should remember that the early church met predominantly in homes so Paul’s instructions regarding spiritual gifts (see

Paul envisions the body of Christ functioning by each one contributing through their unique giftedness.

Taking the Lord's Supper in a House Church

One of the convictions we have is that a house church is the perfect place to take the Lord's Supper. It is helpful to remember that when the Lord shared his supper on the eve of his Passion, it was with twelve of his closest friends on earth. The Lord's Supper is best shared with people that are in covenant together. That does not mean that we won't continue to take the Lord's Supper in our Community and City Church meetings. But we really want to make sure that each house church shares the Lord's Supper regularly.

In order to take the Lord's Supper properly we must first be sure that we properly understand it. In I Corinthians 11, Paul gives his most detailed instructions regarding it. What we learn from that passage (11:17-33) is that the Lord's Supper is not just the bread and wine but an entire meal (see 11:33-34). This makes sense since it is called the Lord's *Supper* rather than the Lord's *Appetizer*! Since Jesus instituted it in the context of the Passover Meal, this is further confirmation that the Lord's Supper is an entire meal. This is further confirmed by the fact that it was called the 'Love Feast' in the first century (Jude 12). It is also clear that sometime during the meal the bread and the wine were shared. So the Lord's Supper is a time when members of a house church who are sharing life together gather to eat the Lord's Supper (meal and elements).

That means that house church leaders should teach their people that the Lord's Supper is not just the elements, but an entire meal in which we are imitating Jesus who ate the meal with his disciples. This will help them to understand that when they come together to eat with the saints, they are all sharing the Lord's Supper. Sometime during the meal (at the end?) the bread and cup can be passed around. In this way, the entire house church learns to reverence the meal together.

A good practice is for a house church to have the Lord's Supper at least once monthly. Let everyone bring food and gather around table for the meal. Since they have learned that the meal itself and not just the elements is the Lord's Supper, it should produce a reverence for it. Make sure and wait till everyone is gathered to share the meal (11:33-34). The goal is to make the taking of the Lord's Supper a covenantal celebration.



Taking the Lord's Supper in a House Church

NOTES

A series of horizontal lines provided for taking notes.

How to Have Good Communication in a House Church

One of the essential keys to an effective house church is learning to have good communication. Some leaders love the meeting and are good at leading it, but they are poor at establishing good communication among the members and between the house church and the elders. We have seen house churches where meetings were cancelled and all the members were not notified. This greatly hinders the establishing of community among the members.

Good communication starts with a house church leader staying in close communication with the members of the group. This is especially important when members don't show up to meetings. Many house church leaders ignore a member's absence until it is clear that they are no longer coming to the group. A good house church leader will attempt to find out why a person or family are no longer attending. This must be done carefully though so the person doesn't feel like they are being checked on every time they miss a meeting.

One way to handle this is to ask someone in the group to check on a person who has missed some meetings and asking them to notify the leader. In this way the person is checked on without the leader having to

call them. This is also a good task to delegate to a person who is being considered for house church leadership. Sometimes though it is good if the leader is the one reaching out to them.

If people stopped coming for a month or two and no one ever attempts to contact them, than the leader has failed to do his/her job. Of course, that is not the case when a person comes for the first time. While they still should be contacted to encourage them to return, with committed members it is different. No leader should lose a committed member and not have attempted to make contact with them. It is part of good pastoral care.

Another area where good communication must be established is between the house church and the TCC office. Many times the elders need house church information which requires the house church's response. It is frustrating when a house church does not comply in a timely manner. A good practice is to have a point person designated in the house church who can communicate that information to the needed parties. Then, it is not entirely on a house church leader to do it.

Where there is poor communication community will suffer; adversely, where communication is good community is enhanced. Every house church leader should be diligent to make sure that good communication is flowing between the members and between the leader and the members, as well as with the TCC office.



How to Have Good Communication in a House Church

NOTES

Horizontal lines for taking notes.

How to reach out to people in the Church

One way to grow a house church is by drawing from both the TCC Community and City Church meetings. In addition to this, a house church leader is regularly fed a list of people who are partners in the area where their house church meets as well as Connection cards of visitors. Every leader should take advantage of these opportunities to reach out to new people.

Some house church leaders complain about their lack of growth, yet do not take advantage of TCC Community or City Church meetings to invite new people to come to their house church. They only talk to their own friends while in meetings and ignore the many people who are there as guests or even partners who are presently not in a house church. Instead, they should be using their times of corporate gatherings to reach out to those who are not in house churches yet.

House church leaders must learn to take advantage of our corporate meetings to meet new people. While it is very tempting to spend your time talking only to friends, leaders must resist that temptation and make themselves accessible to those they do not know.

Appendix

Observing the Lord's Supper

by Brian Anderson

As I officiated over the Lord's Supper on that predictable Sunday morning in November of 1995, I had a nagging feeling that something was not right. This particular communion Sunday proved to be a little different from others we had celebrated in the past five years of my ministry as a teaching elder at Milpitas Bible Fellowship (MBF). I had read testimonies of saints in centuries past who found deep and intimate fellowship with Christ through this holy ordinance. I had believed and taught that the observance of the Lord's Supper was a very special and significant occasion in the life of every local church. Why then, wasn't it more powerful in my own life? The stark reality was that my own observance of the Lord's Supper was neither very special nor significant. It's not that we had grown lax in our observance of the Lord's Supper. On the contrary, we observed it like clockwork on the first Sunday of every month. Rather, I believe it was that we had unthinkingly embraced a manner of observing it that was foreign to the Scriptures. It's amazing how much the church does because of man-made traditions, that when closely scrutinized, simply can't be justified from God's Word. On the first Sunday of every month, miniature plastic cups of grape juice, and broken crackers were made available at the front of the sanctuary.

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While the worship team led the congregation in praises focused on Christ's sacrificial death, the participants would file to the front of the sanctuary to receive the elements. Once everyone had been served and returned to their seats, I would read a passage of Scripture (usually 1 Corinthians 11), offer a prayer of blessing, and then invite everyone to eat and drink together. The entire event could not have lasted more than ten minutes. Although it is always good to spend any length of time remembering the precious sacrifice of Christ, the experience usually left me feeling a bit empty and dissatisfied. I couldn't help but wonder why the observance of the Lord's Supper was not more meaningful in my own life. I found myself wondering if perhaps the problem lay in our own faulty understanding of the sacrament, and secretly hoped that God had more for us in this special event than we had ever dreamed. That hope has not been disappointed.

Changes in the life of a church are never easy. In fact, even if the changes are more Scriptural than its current practices, they are still very threatening. Thus, the status quo, no matter how barren it leaves us, is usually preferred over change. However, we at MBF had long ago adopted the motto, "we are committed to understanding and obeying God's Word." We had determined that if we became convinced that our practices as a church were unscriptural, we would change them - plain and simple. With that as our philosophy of church life and a gnawing sense of dissatisfaction with our observance of the Lord's Supper, the elders decided that we needed to examine the issue afresh to determine what God's Word actually taught. As I began to dig into God's word I had no idea how much our practice of observing the Supper would change as a result of those teachings!

The first thing I noticed in Scripture was the tremendous importance the early church attached to the Lord's Supper. Surprisingly enough, it appeared to be the main focus of their gatherings. "And on the first day of the week, when we were gathered together to break bread, Paul began talking to them, intending to depart the next day, and he prolonged his message until midnight" (Acts 20:7). That which I found so intriguing was that the Bible did not state what I thought it would. For example, it did not declare the church met to hear Paul preach. I would have thought that whenever the apostle Paul was at a church meeting, the purpose of the gathering would be to drink in the apostle's instruction. After all, it wasn't very often that the church had the privilege of an apostle ministering in its midst. Nor does the Scripture state that the church met to worship, to receive an offering, or to evangelize.. According to

Holy Scripture, the stated purpose for which the early church met was to break bread. Furthermore, in 1 Corinthians 11:20 & 33, the purpose of the gathering of the church is again said to be the eating of the Lord's Supper. Additionally, Acts 2:42 records that the disciples were continually devoted to the breaking of bread; indeed their commitment to it was as great as their commitment to apostolic teaching, fellowship, and prayer! This simple truth was like a new revelation to me. I had always thought that the purpose the church gathered was to worship, hear the preaching of the Word, and evangelize the lost. It had never even crossed my mind that the primary purpose for at least some of the gatherings of the saints was to partake of the Lord's Supper. Nevertheless, there it was in Scripture in black and white. I sensed that God was calling the people of MBF to give much greater significance to the Lord's Supper than ever before.

The next discovery was just as radical as the first. I found, much to my surprise, that *the Lord's Supper was intended to be just that - a supper*. Though this ought to have been obvious to me, in reality, it was a completely new concept. I had never partaken of the cup and the bread as part of a full meal. Yet, Scripture refers to the event as the Lord's Supper (1Cor.11:20). A more apt description of the way we had observed it would have been to call it the Lord's Appetizer! Wouldn't you be a bit dismayed if a friend invited you over to supper, but offered you only a morsel of cracker, and a shot glass of juice?! Furthermore, the apostle Jude writes about certain ungodly men who are "hidden reefs in your love feasts when they feast with you without fear, caring for themselves" (Jude 12). Most Bible commentators, I learned, identified these love feasts with the early church's practice of observing the Lord's Supper as part of a full meal. In addition, Paul's words to the church at Corinth began to make sense, "Therefore, when you meet together, it is not to eat the Lord's Supper, for in your eating each one takes his own supper first; and one is hungry and another is drunk" (1Cor.11:20-21). I had read those verses countless times in the past, without it ever making much sense. I was unintentionally seeking to make that statement fit into my traditionally accepted understanding. However, how could eating a tiny piece of cracker satisfy a man's hunger, or drinking an ounce of wine make a man drunk? Clearly, the early church was partaking of a common meal on those special occasions. That really shouldn't have surprised me, for hadn't Jesus instituted the Lord's Supper at a full meal with His disciples? Additionally, hadn't He said that He would never again eat of the Lord's Supper until it was fulfilled in the kingdom of God (Luke 22:16)? I began to understand that our observance of the Lord's Supper not only looked back

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The stated purpose for which the early church met was to break bread.

The observance of the Lord's Supper not only looked back to Christ's atoning death, but also forward to the marriage supper of the Lamb.

to Christ's atoning death, but also forward to the marriage supper of the Lamb that we will enjoy with Him in glory (Rev.19:7). Only a full meal can adequately symbolize that heavenly feast. I was quickly realizing that our observance of the Lord's Supper was going to need more than a minor tune-up; it would need a complete overhaul!

The third discovery I made was that the Lord's Supper was celebrated in small and intimate settings. For example, Acts 2:46 describes the new converts breaking bread from house to house, taking their meals together with gladness and sincerity of heart. Obviously, if these believers were observing the Lord's Supper from house to house, they were doing so in small, intimate settings. Moreover, Acts 20:7-12 describes the breaking of bread as taking place in the intimacy of an upper room of a private home. Furthermore, Paul instructs, "Is not the cup of thanksgiving for which we give thanks a participation in the blood of Christ? And is not the bread that we break a participation in the body of Christ? Because there is one loaf, we who are many, are one body, for we all partake of the one loaf" (1Cor.10:16-17 NIV). Notice carefully that the apostle speaks of "the cup" and "the one loaf." The single cup and loaf, according to Paul, were used in order to portray the precious truth that the church of Christ, though made up of many members, is one. Clearly, Paul had in mind a group small enough to partake of a single loaf and cup. This was all very foreign to me, for I was accustomed to partaking of the Lord's Supper in large, impersonal and somber settings. In fact, I was quite surprised to find the only passage in the Bible, which described the mood of the Lord's Supper, portrayed it as a glad, joyful, and intimate event (Acts 2:46).

The final discovery God gave us had to do with the close connection between fellowship amongst the saints and the Lord's Supper. At MBF, we had emphasized our vertical relationship with Christ, to the exclusion of fellowship with other believers. In fact, the whole observance was carried out without anyone uttering a single word to anyone else. However, now 1Cor.10:16 took on new meaning for me. When the Scripture says, "Is not the cup of blessing which we bless a sharing in the blood of Christ? Is not the bread which we break a sharing in the body of Christ?" I had assumed that the sharing was between an individual believer and God. I learned, though, that the Greek word for sharing is *"koinonia"*, which is usually translated "fellowship" and could just as easily speak of the saints' fellowship with one another. I began to understand that the purpose of the Lord's Supper was not only to

commune with Christ, but also to fellowship with my brothers and sisters around the body and blood of Christ. This also appeared to be born out in Acts 2:42 which uses the word "and" to divide up the disciples' spiritual activities. "And they were continually devoting themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer." In this grammatical construction, fellowship and the breaking of bread seem to be coupled together as a related activity, with "the breaking of bread" an expanded description of their "fellowship." If this was the intention of Luke in writing the Acts, the early church was committed to three things: apostolic teaching, fellowshiping together around the Lord's Table, and prayer.

When we began to discover these new insights we believed God had given to us, at first we were not sure what to do with them. None of us had ever observed the Lord's Supper where it was the primary reason for the meeting, part of a full meal, and celebrated in an intimate, personal, and joyful manner. Furthermore, we didn't know of any other church, which observed the Lord's Supper in this way. However, as we experimented with several different methods of observing the Lord's Supper, God gave us wisdom in weeding out those which did not promote the Biblical discoveries we had made, and clinging to those that did.

In order for you to get a feel for the celebration of the Lord's Supper at MBF, allow me to describe a typical Agape Feast for you. Folks begin arriving about 5:30 on a Sunday evening for the monthly event. As the menfolk push all the chairs against the wall and assemble folding tables into a large rectangle, the women bustle about in the kitchen making last minute preparations. About 6:00 one of the ladies gives the signal that all is ready. The MBF family gathers in a large circle of somewhere between 40 and 60 people, holds hands, and asks God to bless the evening. Large bowls of tossed garden salad, buttered French bread, and steaming pots of spaghetti are placed on the tables, so that the meal can be eaten family style. While the meal is being enjoyed, lively discussion, banter and laughter resonate throughout the room. Clearly, the folks at MBF have looked forward to this gathering, and are enjoying being with one another. After dessert has been served and the dishes and food have been cleared away, two or three brothers and sisters break out their guitars. There is even an occasional banjo or piano. Songbooks are distributed, and for the next twenty to forty minutes the church sings, praises and prays with an occasional interspersing of Scripture reading augmenting the worship. Next there is an opportunity for anyone to share a spiritual contribution

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in the spirit of 1Cor.14:26 that they have brought for the edification of others. One woman sings a song the Lord has given her recently which focuses on the greatness and majesty of God. A young man exhorts the rest to faithfulness to Christ in the midst of trials and tribulations. Another woman reads a poem on the importance of abiding in Christ. Two or three brothers follow with a brief word of instruction. One brother focuses on the fact that Christ's death was intended to produce a holy people, zealous for good works. Another teaches that Christ's death was effectual, actually purchasing the salvation of all God's people. Finally, one of the elders stands and offers a brief teaching focused on the heavenly communion with Christ that we will enjoy one day which our Supper has been portraying. In the midst of the sharing, people feel free to ask a question or share an insight of their own. The scene is much more akin to a family gathering around the dinner table with many excited to speak, than a group of acquaintances engaging in a formal worship service. Finally, at the climax of the evening, one of the elders breaks a loaf of bread in two and passes each around the tables. In like manner, he pours grape juice from a large container into another jug and passes both to the eager participants. Each one takes the container of juice, pours a portion into his cup, and passes it to his neighbor. After everyone is served, one of the elders offers a joyful and sincere prayer of thanksgiving for the person and work of Christ, after which all eat and drink in remembrance of Him. The meeting is spontaneous, enthusiastic, and joyful. The meeting usually lasts somewhere between three and four hours, with folks lingering sometimes for an hour or more to fellowship with one another.

Our attempts to apply God's Word to our observance of the Lord's Supper have not been without problems and difficulties. We have had children hungry for attention sing a cute little song in order to draw the expected applause of the group. At other times, the sharing has seemed more like a performance than spiritual ministry. On still other occasions, I fear, we have been guilty of not treating the Lord's Supper with the seriousness it deserves - a byproduct, perhaps, of the informality of the dinner. However, we have sought to address each of these problems. We have instructed the young children to talk with their parents or one of the elders before sharing at an Agape Feast to make sure that it is appropriate and that their motives are right. The elders have spoken frankly with the church, discouraging applause after someone has

shared a song, and exhorting all to seek a ministry mindset and approach the Supper with the importance and seriousness it warrants.

In spite of the problems that we have had to face, the changes we have made in observing the Lord's Supper have been among the most spiritually profitable we have ever made. I can truly say that the Lord's Supper for me now is one of the most exciting, invigorating, and spiritually significant events in my life.

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How to Properly Prepare a House Church Assistant

by Neil Silverberg

One of the most important needs of a healthy and growing House Church Group is for a leader to give adequate time to the preparation of a future House Church Leader. This is a critical part of the process, since the goal of every House Church is to reach a certain size and give birth to a new House Church. Only as this process is continually occurring can we insure that there are an adequate number of House Churches at TCC to minister to the people. If the goal is to be continually producing new House Churches, than the preparation of new House Church leaders is critical to that process.

Therefore, every House Church Leader should make it a matter of urgent prayer that God would given them an assistant: *a person to work alongside them that they can train to eventually become a House Church leader.* This assistant should get all of the training they need by working in the House Church alongside the leader (besides those specific times of House Church Leader training provided by the Pastors and Zone Leaders at TCC). It is the responsibility of the House Church Leader to train that person adequately so that when the group divides there is a person ready to assume the leadership of the new House Church.

This paper is written to help assist House Church Leaders to understand the process involved in raising up assistants and training them to become mature, House Church Leaders. It covers everything from how to choose the right person, how to adequately train that person so that they have the heart of a shepherd, and how to equip them so that they can lead effectively. Read it carefully and then discuss it with your Zone Leader if you have any questions.

To properly prepare a House Church Leader Assistant every leader should pass through four phases. At the end of this paper I have provided a checklist that will summarize these steps more clearly. The four phases to prepare a leader are:

- Analyzing
- Training
- Equipping
- Releasing

Let's look carefully at each of these.

Analyzing

The first step is to properly *choose* an assistant. How do you do this? First and foremost, the house church leader should be committed to prayer that God would raise up that person. This is in accordance with what our Lord said ('pray the Lord of the harvest to send out workers into his harvest'). This work is so important that it should not be entrusted to someone carelessly but be given to a person who truly has a heart for it. It must be someone who has a solid relationship with God, cares deeply about God's people, and desires to serve the Lord by giving themselves to the people in the group. Therefore, the House Church Leader should be praying from the inception of the group that God would raise up such a person with the heart burden to do it. The simple truth is, we need workers whom God has called to this important task.

Another thing a house church leader should do while analyzing the people in the group for a potential assistant is to delegate tasks to people in order to discover who has a servant heart. Not only will this take the burden off the leader to have to do everything, it complies with a

principle found in God's Word regarding deacons that they "first be tested" before they are set into that position" (I Tim. 3:10). Simple tasks like asking a person to call others who have missed meetings, giving rides to people, bringing snacks, leading in the Lord's Supper, praying with members, etc. are important ways of discovering who really wants to serve. The principle is simple—*always develop the servant heart of a potential leader before giving them any leadership responsibilities.*

As you analyze the people in the group for a potential assistant, look for those who have a stable walk with the Lord. Also, it should be someone whose family life is in order. It goes without saying that the person must be committed to the House Church and is dependable. You do not want an assistant that you cannot depend on to come to meetings and carry out instructions.

This period of analyzing is important. If you begin to feel that you might have a candidate for potential leadership don't talk to that person yet. Continue to pray and ask God to put this desire on their heart as well.

Training:

Once you begin to feel like you might have a person in mind as a potential assistant, schedule a time to talk it over with your Zone Leader. This is an important step. It is possible that a Zone Leader has had a relationship with the person and can shed valuable light. Perhaps that person is struggling with some things you are not aware of. The Zone Leader will stand with you in prayer about the possibility of that person serving as an assistant.

Up till this point, you should not have spoken to the potential candidate about their being a possible house church assistant. You have simply prayed, carefully observed them in the meetings, delegated tasks to them, and spoken to your Zone Leader about that person. At this point, if the person demonstrates a stable walk with the Lord, seems committed to the group, and exhibits a burden for people and a desire to serve, speak again to your Zone Leader about selecting that person as an assistant. If the Zone Leader approves, you should then approach the person and ask them to prayerfully consider being an assistant house church leader. You should explain to them what this entails, making sure they understand that the goal is to eventually birth a new group which they will be leading. A person who desires to be a permanent assistant should not be chosen (there are no permanent assistants). Give them a space of time (a week or

two) to prayerfully consider it and ask them to get back to you in that time period with their answer.

If the person accepts the position as assistant house church leader, notify the group at the next meeting. At this point, the training of the person to be a house church leader should begin. Remember, there should not be any permanent assistants since the goal for every group is to grow to the point where a new group is birthed. *So every assistant house church leader is really a house church leader in training.* How then do you train that person to be a house church leader?

First, make sure they obtain the House Church Leaders Training (Life Together). The person should go through the material so that they are on the same page with the direction of the church.

Also, a house church leader should plan times to get together with the assistant to talk about the group and to strategize. This becomes even more important when the group is in the final stage before dividing. That means that the leader and assistant need to have a healthy relationship so that they enjoy spending time together. This makes working together so much easier. One of the things that the leader needs to do to provide training for the assistant is to talk about previous meetings and discuss how they can be improved. Also, the house church leader should discuss the various needs of the people in the group so that the assistant can learn from the house church leader to really care for the people. Remember, you are not just training a person to lead a meeting but to serve God's people and give them pastoral care. That doesn't mean that you are preparing a pastor. But house church leaders are called to provide pastoral care for people.

Equipping

As the group grows and passes through various stages, a house church leader's task of preparing another leader changes from *training* to *equipping*. In the *training* phase you want to impart to the assistant the heart of a shepherd so that they really care for the people (you must model this if you want to see it in others). In the *equipping* phase, you want to prepare the assistant to learn how to properly lead house church meetings as well as the other *skills* necessary for being an effective leader.

This final phase is simply that of releasing the new house church leader to start the new house church. But this must be done carefully if it is to work. *The number one reason that a new house church fails is the failure of the leader of the birthing house church to build a team that will be committed to go to the new house church.* If a house church is to divide successfully, the leader must work behind the scenes to know how to guide the house church to successfully plant the new house church.

The best way for a leader to prepare the group is to make sure in the weeks leading up to the release, the assistant has had opportunity to lead (or co-lead) several meetings. Then, the leader should announce the plan to birth the new house church under the leadership of the assistant. At that point, the leader should ask the people to pray about where they belong (either with the original house church or with the new one). This should be done several weeks in advance. But the house church leader should not leave it at that. During the ensuing weeks after the announcement was made and the people have had abundant time to pray, the leader should consult with each person in the group to see where they are inclined to go. This is a crucial step and failure to do so has often led to the failure of the new house church.

Why is this step so important? If a house church leader does analyze where the members are inclined to go he could avert the danger of not having a committed core to form the nucleus of the new house church. Then (with this information), he is able to work behind the scenes to help form a core that is willing to go with the new house church. This may mean asking certain people to prayerfully consider going with the new plant. If a house church leader discovers through this process that there are not enough people at this point willing to form the nucleus of a new group he can postpone the plant until a core group is formed.

So the steps of preparing a new house church are as follows:

- *Analyze the group to prayerfully consider who might be raised up as an assistant*
- *Delegate tasks to that person* (without telling them you are considering them as a house church leader). If a person cannot perform simple tasks such as calling people, picking up people who may need rides, preparing the Lord's Supper, they are not going to make good candidates to lead a house church.

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- *Consult with the Zone Leader about the person you are considering (the zone leader might know some reason that person may not be a good selection)*
- *Approach the person and ask them to prayerfully consider their being a house church leader assistant (only after you have spoken to the Zone Leader)*
- *Make sure the assistant obtains a copy of Life Together and goes through it*
- *Build a relationship with the assistant and pray together and strategize together*
- *Allow the assistant to lead some house church meetings*
- *Monitor growth in the house church and prepare for the birthing of the new group*
- *Work behind the scenes to prepare people for the birthing of new group*
- *Once a core is established for the starting of the new group, set a date for launch*
- *Have a final meeting and pray for those who are leaving*

How to Produce a Culture of Prayer in a House Church

by Neil Silverberg

One of the keys to a successful house church (as well as a successful church) is to produce a culture of prayer in your group. In Acts 2:42 we are told that the Early Church was devoted to 'prayer' along with the other practices of their community (teaching, fellowship, breaking of bread). That meant that while they heard rich teaching, lived in transparent relationships and gathered around the Lord's Supper, they also were a community that knew how to pray together.

Without that commitment to prayer, this community could have had a wonderful social life without the power of God to fulfill their mission. Prayer safeguarded them from this and guaranteed that the presence of God pervaded everything that they did. And they didn't just pray casually or if they found time for it; Luke is clear that they were devoted to it! That is the same thing the apostle Paul said in Romans 12:12. Early believers were taught that they were to commit themselves to prayer. The Church throughout the ages has taught the importance of prayer as one of the spiritual disciplines.

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It is easy to forget this in the life of a house church. After all, we enjoy such rich fellowship in our groups that it is quite possible for prayer to take a back seat. House church leaders must avoid this by first being men and women who are devoted to prayer in their own lives. *We cannot lead people into practices that we ourselves avoid!* So the place to start is for a house church leader to examine his or her life of prayer. If it is weak and beggarly, leaders must ask God to renew their hearts to a new commitment of prayer.

In order to be devoted to prayer in a house church, time must be given to it in the meetings. This should be more than a token prayer at the beginning or the lifting up of a few needs at the end. First of all, leaders should be prepared (after Ice-Breakers) to bathe the meeting in God's presence. People should learn from leaders that they are people who have a desperate need for God's presence. Prayer must not only be *taught* but *caught!* If the leader is a person who is devoted to prayer than it will be contagious.

There will be times when house church meetings will be asked to hold special times of prayer because of urgent prayer needs that arise in the community. There will also be times when the whole church is holding prayer meetings in our house churches. While we will have times to gather for prayer in our Community and City church configurations, we want to insure that a culture of prayer is evident in all of our house churches. We must take seriously the promises attached to prayer in the Word of God. Wise house church leaders will frequently speak about those promises to their people and urge them to develop a devotion to prayer in their own lives.

