

[from Frank Viola <http://www.ocean.org/frank-viola/viewer/itemid/152/organizational-vs-organic>]

### Isolating the Differences

Getting more specific, let's isolate some of the main differences between an organic expression of the church and an organized (or institutional) form of the Church:

Organized Church	Organic Church
+ The form of the church precedes the life of the church. Thus, the church begins with clergy, staff, programs, rituals, etc.	+ The form of the church follows the life of the church—just as the form of the human body springs out of the life of the human.
+ Sustained by a professional clergy or minister.	+ There's no clergy or professional minister.
+ The clergy seeks to energize the laity.	+ Don't recognize a separate class (laity).
+ Limit many spiritual functions to the ordained.	+ Recognize all members as acting priests.
+ Render the bulk of their congregants passive during church services.	+ Allow and encourage all Christians to function in the meetings of the church.
+ Members associate church with a building, a denomination, or a religious service (Sunday morning typically).	+ Affirm that people do not go to church; they (together) are the church. This isn't being "theologically correct." It's the actual experience of the members.
+ Unified around a shared set of customs or doctrines.	+ Unified around Christ alone. There is no other test of fellowship.
+ Sustained by programs.	+ Sustained by relationships built on Jesus Christ.
+ Need finances to survive— their main costs are building overhead and clergy/staff salaries	+ Are not dependant on a building. There are no clergy salaries. Resources are spent on "the poor among you" and extra local work.
+ Leadership is hierarchical.	+ Leadership comes from the entire body. Church planters equip the church in the beginning, elders (when they emerge) oversee the church together.
+ Decisions are made by the clergy or a specially elected "board."	+ Decisions are made corporately by consensus.
+ The pastor is the leader and minister of the church.	+ Shepherds are plural. They are a gifted people who care for the flock.
+ There's a strong focus on attendance to services, maintaining the building, and increasing the budget. What Dallas Willard calls the ABCs (attendance, buildings, cash)	+ The focus is on pursuing Jesus Christ corporately in face-to-face community. Everything else springs out of that .
+ The church does essentially the same thing week after week, month after month, year after year. It's locked into a ritual.	+ The church passes through seasons. It is not locked into a ritual.
+ Gifts are viewed as offices, and people are put into those offices at the very beginning.	+ Gifts are not seen as offices, but as functions. They emerge naturally and organically over time. They come up out of the soil, and are typically not titled.
+ It's typical for members not to know one another very well, only seeing each other at weekly church services.	+ There's a close-knit community. Members are like family to one another. They live a shared life in Christ.

# Barbie

## Dream Church

- ★ STARBUCK'S
- ★ GAME ROOM
- ★ BAPTISTRY/JACUZZI
- ★ THEATER SEATING



**Hey, Girls!** With a new degree from Fuller Seminary and a wicked sense of fashion, Church-Growth Barbie is creating 40 Days of Style with her very own Dream Church that is sure to pack 'em in.

Sure, Barbie and Ken are living together, but in a totally cool church like this one, who cares?

**BROKEN NAIL?  
JESUS CAN HELP!**



**DREAM CHURCH COMES READY TO USE AS SHOWN. BIBLICAL INSTRUCTIONS NOT NECESSARY TO BUILD.**

IF SEEKER-SENSITIVE CHURCHES  
EXISTED DURING THE ICE AGE...





**As Bill dozed off under his Sunday morning newspaper, he realized his “church at home” idea was probably going to send him straight to Hell.**

[[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Simple\\_church](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Simple_church)]

# Simple church

The **Simple Church** movement is an [Evangelical Christian](#) movement that seeks to redefine the nature and practice of [church](#).

The movement claims to be "a Christ-centered community established primarily on relationship both to God and to the other members of the group." In doing so it discards many aspects of conventional expressions of church, which is considered beneficial by some, and problematic by others. This gives those in the movement the opportunity to focus on what it considers to be the core practices of [Christian](#) spirituality.

## Simple

A simple church may meet anywhere; with or without trained leaders, formal [liturgy](#), programmes or structures.<sup>[1]</sup> To facilitate relationship, discipleship (spiritual formation), multiplication, mobility, and member ownership, a simple church is usually a [small group](#) of no more than 20-25 persons.

Church "programs" are virtually nonexistent and small group participation is essential. The process of moving from worship to small group, small group to mission work, and mission work to worship is a primary focus. Authors Tony and Felicity Dale, founders of *House2House Ministries*, have promoted the term "simple church" in their book "Simply Church" ([ISBN 0-9718040-1-X](#)).<sup>[2]</sup>

The term *simple church* is often used interchangeably with other terms like organic church,<sup>[3]</sup> essential church, primitive church, bodylife, relational church, and micro-church<sup>[4]</sup>. Some groups use other names for their groups, although they would consider themselves part of or related to the simple church phenomenon.

Perhaps the most common synonym is [house church](#), which has much more popular usage and predates the term simple church. Recently, a number of established Christian denominations and mission organizations have officially supported efforts to develop house church networks. These include the following: The Free Methodist Church in Canada, The Foursquare Gospel Church of Canada, The Evangelical Fellowship of Canada, The Presbyterian Church in Canada, Partners in Harvest, The [Southern Baptist Convention](#) (USA), Dove Christian Fellowship International, DAWN Ministries (Discipling a Whole Nation), and [Youth With A Mission](#) (YWAM), and [Eternal Grace](#)<sup>[5]</sup>.

## Origins and influences

Many in the simple church movement point to the [New Testament](#), especially the [Gospels](#), [Acts](#), and the writings of the [Apostle Paul](#) for justification of their model (see "[House Church, Scriptural Basis](#)").

Historically speaking, simple gatherings of the faithful were the norm of [Early Christianity](#). Between 100 AD and 300 AD, Christianity grew from 25,000 to 20 million people in the Roman Empire. In fact, much of the New Testament was written to people who met in house churches.<sup>[6]</sup>

Early Christian house churches were patterned after house [synagogues](#) which were numerous.<sup>[7]</sup> Christians took a low-cost and easy-to-multiply model and adapted it to their new Christian context. In addition, the Communion service, sometime called the [Lord's Supper](#), was uniquely Christian (though modeled on the [Passover](#)). Since it did not apply to Jews and therefore did not fit in the Jewish

synagogues, it had to be celebrated somewhere else. House churches were the natural place for communion to be shared. As time went on, Christians were banned from Jewish synagogues as persecution intensified (see [Split of early Christianity and Judaism](#) for details). Although house churches flourished in times of persecution, they were well established before them.

Today, the simple church movement in the West has recently regained attention but has been quite normative in other parts of the world where Christianity has historically been persecuted. In places like China, the movement has multiplied as part of an underground Christian movement, which is otherwise banned from meeting. Some recent Christian writers have supported the view that the church should continue to meet in houses, and have based the operation of their communities around multiple small home meetings.

In the West, simple church can be traced back to the house church movement. In North America and the UK particularly, the house church movement is often viewed as a development and logical extension of the 'Brethren' or [Plymouth Brethren](#) movement, where many individuals and assemblies have adopted new approaches to worship and governance, while others recognise a relationship to the [Anabaptists](#), [Quakers](#), [Amish](#), [Hutterites](#), [Mennonites](#), [Moravians](#), [Methodists](#), and the much earlier [Waldenses](#) and [Priscillianists](#). Another perspective sees the house church movement as a re-emergence of the move of the Holy Spirit during the [Jesus Movement](#) of the 1970s in the USA or the worldwide [Charismatic Renewal](#) of the late 1960s and 1970s. Others see it as a return to a New Testament church [restorationist](#) paradigm and a restoration of God's eternal purpose and the natural expression of Christ on the earth, urging Christians to return from hierarchy and rank to practices described and encouraged in Scripture.

Simple church has also been influenced by overseas missions and the growth of [church planting](#) movements[8]. Church planting movements are spontaneously growing church multiplication efforts that often result in thousands of new simply structured faith communities. The growth and character of these movements has impressed many who would like to see similar things happening in [Europe](#), the [United States](#), and the [West](#) in general. Groups like DAWN Ministries have switched to simple church as their model for domestic missions in the hope that this phenomenon that has been effective overseas will also work here[9].

The Missional Movement[10] has also influenced simple church[11]. Missional thinking grew from the lessons learned from foreign missionaries and as a reaction to the [Church growth](#) Movement. In this line of thought, the Church's purpose and theology comes out of the [Missio dei](#) -- God's Mission in the World. This means that everything relating to church life and Christian practice should be directly derived from a theology of mission. This means the Body of Christ should be primarily identifying with humanity, reaching the lost, ushering in the Reign of God, and working towards the peace ([Shalom](#)) the [Kingdom of God](#) brings. To aid its cause, missional thinking promotes incarnational ministry, messianic spirituality, indigenaity[12], and innovation. For many simple church practitioners, their model of church aids in completing the [missional](#) mandate of God by being highly mobile, easily adaptable, and fundamentally indigenous.

## Values

As in any decentralized, spontaneous movement, a variety of values are expressed in simple church. Due to the influence of some key groups and Acts 2:42-47, three overarching values have emerged in many circles:

Adherents Dr. Paul Kaak (who interestingly began ministry in one of the largest and most systematized mega-churches in America) and Neil Cole (author of *Organic Church* (c)2005 John Wiley) originally

articulated these values using the organic metaphor of DNA:

- **D - Divine Truth** : Truth is the foundation for everything. By Divine Truth, we mean the dynamic and living presence of Christ and His Word.[\[13\]](#)
- **N - Nurturing Relationships** : Healthy relationships are what make up a family. Love for one another is to be a constant pursuit of the family of God. This is the most basic of Christ's commands.
- **A - Apostolic Mission** : Apostolic means, simply, "sent." Just as Jesus was sent on a mission, so we are sent out on a mission for Him. Our mission is to go into the world and disciple the nations for their good and God's glory [\[14\]](#)

These values have since been promoted by House2House Ministries[\[15\]](#) and DAWN North America, and have been adopted by various groups like New York's MetroSoul.[\[16\]](#)

## Practices

Adherent Frank Viola's book *Pagan Christianity* points out a number of reforms that organic churches often advocate.

- The belief that modern clergy is a vestige of Roman pagan religion and was absent from the early church and is largely at odds with the true priesthood of all believers. The movement sees the institution of the clergy at odds with passages like Matthew 20, Matthew 23, 3rd John, and the message in Revelation regarding the deeds of the Nicolaitians (Greek-literally those who triumph over the people). 1 Corinthians 12-14 paints a picture of an every-member functioning church meeting entirely at odds with the modern religious service which is performed by professionals for an audience. However, some believe this view does not take into account the Jewish and synagogue based nature of the ekklesia, which explains the talk of elders and deacons found in the New Testament. In reply, many simple churches do recognize elders and deacons according to the biblical standards laid out in Timothy and Titus, but believe these people emerge over time as their character becomes descriptive of these roles. In an environment where people are free to express their gifts, such people can emerge. Also, being an elder or deacon does not mean this person dominates the meeting. 3 John rebukes Diotrephes the elder who had to be first and was dominating. The simple church largely believes the idea that an elder or deacon is not a license for some to minister and others to be passive.
- Valuing the Lord's Supper occurring as a regular, recurring full meal celebration rather than a short religious ritual. The early integration of the home based ritual into the public synagogue-like meeting functioned to reduce the symbolic nature of the act to a private moment, replacing its symbolism of fellowship and dedication to the Lord. This was complete by the time of Constantine, when home based [agape feasts](#) were banned. However, this history does not in itself devalue the need for the larger synagogue-like meeting for prayer, ministry of the word and singing. Simple church adherents also enjoy occasional and even monthly larger gatherings that do this very thing, though they emphasize the smaller meeting of the ekklesia as the environment for spiritual growth.
- Organic churches tend to place less emphasis on the building or meeting place. To this end, Neil Cole, an adherent of simple church, states that "buildings, budgets, and big shots," tend to do more to contain Christianity than allow it to spread (Organic Church (c) 2005, Cole). However, this statement against larger sized churches does nothing to substantiate its claim. For documentation on the organic Church movement, see George Barna's Revolution or Neil Cole's

Organic Church.

## Media and popular attention

In recent years, the growth of the movement as it becomes more missionally focused, and the adoption of simple church by various missions groups, missionary societies, and [parachurch](#) organizations, has led to increased visibility. News coverage by specialized and mainstream media is becoming more common:

- Michael Alison Chandler and Arianne Aryanpur, "[Going to Church by Staying at Home: Clergy-Less Living Room Services Seen as a Growing Trend](#)" *Washington Post* <http://www.washingtonpost.com> (Printed June 4, 2006, pg. A12) (Accessed September 30, 2006).
- Stuart Laidlaw, "[Religion, but no church required](#)" *Toronto Star* <http://www.thestar.com> (Accessed September 30, 2006).
- David Van Biema and Rita Healy, "[There's No Pulpit Like Home](#)" *Time* <http://www.time.com> (Accessed September 30, 2006).

Many books have been written on the simple church movement, especially by insiders (see booklist of Wikipedia's [House Church, Recommended Books](#)). Recently, books are beginning to appear by those studying the movement from a more objective view. Most notable is George Barna's "Revolution"[\[17\]](#). Barna, perhaps the most influential pollster and church growth consultant in [Evangelical](#) Christianity, says that "revolutionary" expressions such as simple church will soon account for one third of American spirituality.[\[18\]](#)

Visibility of the movement has also increased due to national and regional gatherings of various kinds. The largest of these is the Annual House Church Conference held in Dallas, and, occasionally, other locations by House2House. There are also many smaller localized or regional conferences where people may be exposed to simple church ideas, like CMA Resources' Green House, and DCFI's House Church Seminar.

The ["Century One Project"][\[3\]](#) provides seminars and conferences on the subject of 'Biblical Church.' Century One's founder, Gary Ward, observes that church can be found in the New Testament and the Apostles taught a way to meet. Identifying many of today's church practices as 'inherited' from the Roman Catholic practices, Gary appeals for Christians to begin to reform what they do for church and move towards obedience to the scriptures.

## Criticism

How the simple church movement relates to constructing a [theology](#) and [ecclesiology](#) is the subject of much debate, especially with critics of the movement. Some within the simple church movement believe the Bible shows this model as the most valid form of church, even the original intention of God. Others see the Bible as presenting an expression of simple Christian community that is a valid option, but not necessarily the "right" or "only" choice.

Several prominent voices have serious concerns about simple church. For example, J. Lee Grady (Charisma Online Editor) says such a movement wants to "reinvent the church without its biblical structure and New Testament order — and without the necessary people who are anointed and appointed by God to lead it. To follow this defective thesis to its logical conclusion would require us to fire all pastors, close all seminaries and Bible colleges, padlock our sanctuaries and send everybody home..."[\[19\]](#) Grady and other critics worry that the simple church movement could encourage people to



leave more traditional forms of church, which could lead to further collapse or decline of Christendom. Online discussion boards contain much of the current debate between simple church practitioners and opponents because the conversation is not yet mainstream enough to be in many other forms of media. [20] These conversations usually revolve around several issues:

- **Leadership:** Who are the leaders and what is the leadership structure? Is the simple church understanding of leadership biblical? Is there enough control to prevent abuse, cultism, and [heresy](#)? Will there be many arguments as a result of conflicting opinions arising from differing levels of religious education and experience? Are the lay leaders in simple churches qualified for the care of others? Adherent Frank Viola replies to this in his book *Reimagining Church* saying that certain strains of the movement look to apostolic outside coaching for help and try to prevent any one charismatic person from dominating the meeting. Other leaders emerge over time according to function, emerging as others respect their authentic experience of the Lord. The Christian's ultimate "covering" is Jesus Himself and the local believing community that gathers in His name.
- **Longevity:** According to sources within the movement, the average lifespan of a simple church is 6 months to two years. [21] This leaves critics to wonder how Christianity can survive in such a transient movement. What will be the long-term impact of simple church? Adherents might reply that the sticking power is not in a static institution but a multiplying movement of the Holy Spirit. The hope for organic churches is exponential multiplication, meaning that two churches become four, four become sixteen, and so forth. The same question could be asked of institutional churches where closure and the failure of new church plants is also a problem. Traditional approaches to church can be expensive and rare in their ability to replicate and multiply. Nonetheless organic church has yet to substantiate its growth claims in the optimistic terms in which they are made.
- **Orthodoxy:** Without denominational control or pastoral oversight, who will maintain orthodoxy among simple churches and its participants? Isn't it a breeding ground for people with wild theologies who would get drummed out of more traditional and more orthodox churches? These questions seem to be more based on fear than the reality of practicing organic churches. In its defense, heresy is no more likely to spread than in any other form of church. The nature of accountability in an every-member functioning church can deal with heresy appropriately. Many within organic churches are seminary educated, many of having left positions of prominence in the organized church out of conviction.
- **Teaching:** It is rare for simple churches to have sermons or Bible classes in the formal sense? Critics wonder when teaching occurs and how people are formed educationally and doctrinally in simple churches. Without concentrated teaching, sermons, and bible classes, how will believers be educated? Adherent Frank Viola, in *Reimagining Church*, points out that Christian meetings are where worshippers gather around Jesus Christ and every member functions as described in 1 Corinthians. Here people share how God is feeding them, and this can be very rich. Viola contrasts this with "ministry events," where teaching, education, or even evangelism occur, or where an outsider comes to minister to a group. This point, does not in itself deal with the biblical nature of synagogue-like events where one of the elders is responsible for "preaching and teaching," as in 1 Timothy 5v17. Believers in the simple movement also have opportunities for good teaching, biblical education, to read Christian books, and so forth. In fact every Christian is encouraged to feed upon Christ, which is contrasted with the system where one or two clergy teach and others absorb from them.

- **Outreach potential:** How will unchurched people or visitors find the church when there is no location and no phone book listing? In common with many evangelicals, adherents of organic church believe that worship should not be bound to a location; but rather be thought of as the way a community offers their lives to God. Nonetheless it is possible for a community to understand this and retain a public presence.
- **Relationship with established churches:** Is simple church another movement pulling people away from congregational churches? Is it a threat to more traditional models? Do simple church practitioners condemn or criticize other forms of church? Can simple churches and traditional forms of church work together? It is the expressed hope of many churches that lost people find a relationship with Jesus Christ. Neil Cole, Frank Viola, and other adherents admit that God works in and through the organized church as well as the organic church. Many people in the organic church acknowledge that they were saved while in more formal churches.
- **Cultural accommodation/syncretism:** Has simple church sold out to a culture that sinfully refuses to "go to church?" Is simple church just caving in to postmodernism? Does simple church promote the West's tendency to worship the individual and individualism? Such questions are complex. Writers such as Lesslie Newbigin<sup>[22]</sup> have made the point that the church shows every sign of being captive to modernism. Where many in the church believe that western culture is becoming more postmodern, the same danger of captivity applies, but now in a different cultural context. Newbigin suggests that retreating into a private world of faith is a mistake in any context, and therefore would be critical of the simple church approach.<sup>[23]</sup>

Self-criticism is also present in the movement. Leaders and prominent voices have pointed out key issues, like leadership development, exclusivity, missional effectiveness, and other items as points of concern. A good example of this is Andrew Jones, an emerging church advocate and simple church practitioner<sup>[24]</sup>. Many in the simple church consider this kind of self-evaluation very healthy and tie it to the important prophetic role in the movement.

[\[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/House\\_church\]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/House_church)

## House church

House church, or "home church", ([traditional Chinese](#): 地下天國; literally "Underground Heaven") is used to describe an independent assembly of [Christians](#) who gather in a home. Sometimes this occurs because the group is small, and a home is the most appropriate place to gather, as in the beginning phase of the [British New Church Movement](#). Sometimes it is because the group is a member of an [underground](#) Christian movement, which is otherwise banned from meeting, as in [China](#). Some recent Christian writers have supported the view that the [Christian Church](#) should meet in houses, and have based the operation of their communities around multiple small home meetings. They claim that this approach is preferable to public meetings in dedicated buildings because it is a more effective way of building community and it helps the group to engage in [outreach](#) more naturally. Some believe small churches were a deliberate apostolic pattern in the [first century](#) and intended by [Christ](#).<sup>[1]</sup> [Cell churches](#) are usually associated with larger churches: they also meet in homes and share some characteristics of house churches. They are not normally considered to be a house church, as they are not self-governing.

Some within the house church movement (associated with Wolfgang Simson, Frank Viola and others)

consider the term "house church" to be a [misnomer](#), asserting that the main issue for Christians who practice their faith in this manner is not the house but the type of meeting that takes place. Other titles which may be used to describe this movement are "simple church" "relational church," "primitive church," "body life," "organic church," or "biblical church." However all of the practices implied by these terms are shared with many other churches outside the movement.

## Early Christian house churches

The [Dura-Europos house church](#), ca. 232, with chapel area on right.

The first house church is recorded in [Acts 1:13](#), where the [disciples of Jesus](#) met together in the "Upper Room" of a house, traditionally believed to be where the [Cenacle](#) is today. For the first three centuries of the church, known as [Early Christianity](#), Christians typically met in homes, if only because intermittent persecution (before the [Edict of Milan](#) in 313) did not allow the erection of [public church buildings](#). [Clement of Alexandria](#), an early church father, wrote of worshipping in a house. The [Dura-Europos church](#), a private house in [Dura-Europos](#) in [Syria](#), was excavated in the 1930s and was found to be used as a Christian meeting place in AD 232, with one small room serving as a [baptistry](#).<sup>[2]</sup> At many points in subsequent history, various Christian groups worshipped in homes, often due to persecution by the state church or the civil government.

## Scriptural basis

Christians who meet together in homes usually do so because of a desire to return to basic Church meetings as found in the [New Testament](#). The New Testament shows that the early Christian church exhibited a simplicity of fellowship and interactive practice that is typically not the case in conventional [denominations](#). They believe that Christians walked closely with each other, in close fellowship, sharing their lives in Christ together. This is expressed by 50 examples of the phrase "one another" found in the New Testament. Some Bible passages that indicate the atmosphere of early church life include:

### Lifestyle

"They were continually devoting themselves to the [apostles](#)' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer." (Acts 2:42 [NASB](#))

### Participatory meetings

"What is the outcome then, brethren? When you assemble, each one has a psalm, has a teaching, has a revelation, has a tongue, has an interpretation. Let all things be done for edification." (1 Cor. 14:26 [NASB](#); see also Colossians 3:16, Hebrews 10:24–25)

### Meeting in homes

"Aquila and Prisca greet you heartily in the Lord, with the church that is in their house." (1 Cor. 16:19 [NASB](#); see also Acts 20:20, Romans 16:5, Colossians 4:15, [Philemon](#) 1:2).

### Networking through 'Extra-local, Itinerant Ministries'

"After some days Paul said to Barnabas, "Let us return and visit the brethren in every city in which we proclaimed the word of the Lord, and see how they are." (Acts 15:36 [NASB])

### Occasional Large Group Meetings

"I did not shrink from declaring to you anything that was profitable, and teaching you publicly and from house to house" (Acts 20:20 [NASB])

### Jesus model

" For where two or three come together in my name, there am I with them." (Matthew 18:20 [NIV])

# Structure and organization

## Leadership

Some assemblies have a conventional leadership structure; others have none. A commonly held belief in the modern-day house church "movement" is that the [Protestant Reformation](#) did not go far enough to demonstrate a [New Testament](#) belief in the "priesthood of all believers" and that Jesus Christ alone is the Head of the Church, and the believers the body. The absence of hierarchical leadership structures in many house churches, while often viewed by the Protestant church at large as a sign of anarchy or rebelliousness to authority, is viewed by many in the house church movement to be the most viable way to come under true spiritual authority of love, relationships, and the visible dominion of Jesus Christ as Head of his own bride (i.e. the church). This does not mean that they reject all leadership, however. Many house churches develop [elders](#) and deacons who serve the members. Some house churches also accept ministry from church planters and itinerant workers whom they consider to be apostles.

## Meeting format

Many house church gatherings are free, informal, and sometimes include a shared meal. Participants hope that everyone present will feel free to contribute to the gathering as and when they sense the leading of the [Holy Spirit](#) to do so. Leadership structures range from no official leaders, to a plurality of appointed [elders](#). There is a deliberate attempt within most house churches to minimize the leadership of any one person. Having a lone pastor is generally considered unscriptural and such meetings prefer an openly plural responsibility of leadership.

## Networking

The house church movement today also owes much of its networking and exchange of information to the use of the [Internet](#); HC is generally used as an abbreviation for "House Church" and IC is used to designate "Institutional Church", which is the generalized term for more traditional church structures, including a church building and/or [sermon](#)-centered church services directed by a [pastor](#) or [minister](#). More recently local networks of house churches have begun to form, with gatherings of house churches in an area getting together periodically for celebrations.

## Modern revival

The origins of the so-called house church movement are varied. In North America and the UK particularly, it is often viewed as a development and logical extension of the 'Brethren' or [Plymouth Brethren](#) movement both in doctrine and practice where many individuals and assemblies have adopted new approaches to worship and governance, while others recognise a relationship to the [Anabaptists](#), [Quakers](#), [Amish](#), [Hutterites](#), [Mennonites](#), [Moravians](#), [Methodists](#), and the much earlier [Waldenses](#) and [Priscillianists](#). Another perspective sees the house church movement as a re-emergence of the move of the Holy Spirit during the [Jesus Movement](#) of the 1970s in the USA or the worldwide [Charismatic Renewal](#) of the late 1960s and 1970s. Others see it as a return to a New Testament church [restorationist](#) paradigm and a restoration of God's eternal purpose and the natural expression of Christ on the earth, urging Christians to return from hierarchy and rank to practices described and encouraged in Scripture.

## Relationship to Established Churches, Missions Groups and society

Historically, there have been tensions between house church movements (along with other restoration and revival movements) and traditional churches. Therefore, many house churches do not have formal links to larger Christian organizations as a matter of principle. (A home group / bible study which is connected with a denomination is usually referred to as a [cell church](#).)

Recently, however, a number of established Christian denominations and mission organizations have officially supported efforts to develop house church networks. These include the following: The Free Methodist Church in Canada, The Foursquare Gospel Church of Canada, The Evangelical Fellowship of Canada, The Presbyterian Church in Canada, Partners in Harvest, The [Southern Baptist Convention](#) (USA), Dove Christian Fellowship International, DAWN Ministries (Discipling a Whole Nation), and [Youth With A Mission](#) (YWAM), [Eternal Grace](#)[3], and the recently launched Underground Churches among others.

In a social sense, the movement towards house churches may be linked to other [social movements](#) as well, such as the "[emerging church movement](#)", [missional living](#), the [parachurch movement](#),<sup>[[citation needed](#)]</sup> and perhaps even larger social phenomena such as [panocracy](#) and [intentional living](#) movements.<sup>[[citation needed](#)]</sup>

## House Church Movement

Today, the spread of house churches is largely found in countries such as [China](#), [Vietnam](#), [India](#), [Cuba](#), [Brazil](#) and [African](#) nations<sup>[4]</sup>, but they are also seen in small, but growing, numbers in the [Philippines](#), [Europe](#), and [North America](#).<sup>[4]</sup>

[<http://hubpages.com/hub/What-Makes-House-Church-Different-From-Traditional-Churches>]

## What Makes House Church Different From Traditional Churches?

Here are some differences between traditional church models and house churches that make house churches unique in their kingdom strategy:

1. House churches are small. They usually will have a limit between 12-30 people which allows them to build close knit communities of faith where people can live out their Christianity with each other. This doesn't mean they don't grow, this just means they multiply quicker.

Traditional churches typical have the goal of building larger sized congregations with the focus being on the corporate gatherings.

2. House churches are missional. Because they meet in homes, they have the ability to reach the community with the kingdom of God directly. Loving your neighbors becomes achievable. Traditional church paradigms tend to be attractional based. Bigger buildings, better facilities and larger events will hopefully draw people to us instead of going out to them.

3. House churches experience communion as a full meal. Rather than broken snack crackers and

thimbles of grape juice, house churches have "love feasts". They eat together as families do and experience communion just as they did in the book of Acts. This is pretty impossible to do most Sunday mornings with groups of 1000 plus.

4. House churches allow gifts to participate in the meeting. Due to the size, it is more conducive for the gifts of the Spirit to operate more frequently. In large corporate groups, again this is nearly impossible and as a result are usually centered around one or two teaching or worship gifts. I'm not saying to do away with these larger "celebratory" meetings, just don't call them church.

[\[http://manitobasimplechurch.blogspot.com/\]](http://manitobasimplechurch.blogspot.com/)

## “Church”

I think I am slowly but surely finding ways to explain how I view “church” now. I was having lunch with a friend who was very interested in what we were doing for “church” and I was struggling with how to explain my shift in thinking (we no longer go to church as we have been used to). Since then I have thought much about how to explain my shift and have come up with this :

“I have moved from expecting Sunday morning church service to fill my spiritual needs and am finding my spiritual needs met through the ‘where one or two are gathered’ meetings.”

To broaden this concept, I am able to do “church” in the aisle at the grocery store because my friend and I had an encouraging spiritual conversation; I can do “church” with my office neighbour through an encouraging conversation; I can get spiritual encouragement from people who don’t even see themselves as “religious”, etc. etc. “Church” is sooooo much broader than I ever gave it credit because I focused on the “Sunday mornin’ meetin’ “. My family and I have chosen to meet weekly with a small group of followers of Jesus for encouragement which I will never give up but it is not the end all of spiritual encouragement. There is so much more “church” hiding in unexpected places. We just need to give it the credit it deserves as “church”.

[\[http://www.joymag.co.za/article.php?id=163\]](http://www.joymag.co.za/article.php?id=163)

## 'House Churches': Helpful or Harmful to the Body of Christ?

'According to David, there is a strong Biblical case for meeting in homes. We asked a few pertinent questions.

### **Q: WHY ARE YOU INVOLVED IN HOUSE CHURCH?**

In Jerusalem they met in homes and Paul started most, if not all, of his churches in the homes of members. There are also practical reasons including a greater intimacy, a family atmosphere, stronger discipleship and the low cost of starting a new church.

There is nothing special about the house as a meeting place. We actually do not talk about house churches much - we call them simple churches because they are simple to start and replicate. We have seen churches start in homes, in businesses, public parks, under trees, in schools and even on busses.

Church can meet wherever a group of people want to worship and obey Christ.

**Q: ARE'NT MOST WESTERNISED HOUSE CHURCHES JUST MADE UP OF HURTING OR OFFENDED PEOPLE WHO HAVE LEFT THEIR LOCAL CHURCHES?**

There are many reactionary house churches out there. Some people, angry with their pastors, have formed groups that meet in homes. But not every church that meets in a house is the same, as not every church that meets in a church building is the same. It's all about foundations. If a church is established on criticism and bitterness, it will not last long.

Paul is clear that church planters have a responsibility to build on the foundation of Christ (1Cor 3:11). I have no interest in being reactionary. Many of my friends are pastors of congregational churches and sincere followers of Christ. I love them and serve them wherever I can.

Some of them are beginning to partner with us to plant 'Simple Churches' amongst people who would never attend their congregational churches. Simple church is able to reach those people because it goes to them instead of waiting for them to come to us.

**Q: DON'T SIMPLE CHURCHES BECOME LITTLE GROUPS CUT OFF FROM THE REST OF THE BODY OF CHRIST?**

Every natural family is part of an extended family. The same is true for spiritual families. Networking is very important for a simple church. Isolated churches of any kind are unhealthy. We build networks of leaders who meet regularly.

We also have a variety of ways to cross-pollinate with one another, including celebrations, teaching meetings, gatherings for men or women, birthday parties, special outings, etc.

**Q: YOU TALK A LOT ABOUT CHURCH PPLANTING. HOW DOES THIS HAPPEN?**

We train every member in our churches to make disciples of those who do not know Christ. This results in new followers of Christ, which often results in new churches. When new churches are started, people are free to leave or remain with their original groups. In the last six months we saw over 75 new churches start in South Africa with an attendance of between 10-40 people. Some grow larger.

These are only the churches that we are tracking – there are others in other movements. The new churches started mostly with unchurched people. We also do not control or dictate the size of the churches. When planting new churches is the goal, they never grow too large because they are continually sending out members.

**Q: HOW DO YOU PREVENT HERETICAL TEACHING?**

This is not a simple church problem, but a wider one affecting the whole Body of Christ. The best defence against false doctrine is for every believer to be firmly grounded in the Word of God. In our churches, we read the Word every week, discuss it and encourage obedience to it. Our leadership is empowering, not controlling. This atmosphere makes it very difficult for anyone to impose false teachings on the groups.

**Q: WHO IS THE 'PASTOR' OF A TYPICAL SIMPLE CHURCH?**

Simple churches do not have pastors in the sense of the congregational church model. Rather, networks of churches develop shared leadership teams of elders and deacons as well as the gifts found in Ephesians 4:11-16.

This leadership serves the churches by encouraging and mentoring. Think of a sports coach. He does not play the game, but coaches the team to play the game. Simple churches are teams of players, not spectators. Everyone is involved in ministry.

**Q: HOW IS IT CONTROLLED? HOW DO YOU HOLD LEADERS ACCOUNTABLE?**

History has taught us that we cannot control people. When we try, they simply get frustrated, leave and start a new church down the road! True leadership is through example and inspiration.

Leaders are servants. When people deviate from the truth, leaders also need to rebuke and discipline. In a relational setting, this correction is much more successful and easily received. True accountability can only be achieved inside strong, healthy relationships.

**Q: WHAT DO YOU TEACH?**

The Bible. I know this sounds overly simplistic, but we literally follow the Word of God as closely as possible. Every discipleship group and every church reads the Bible every week and encourages obedience to the Word. Obedience is more important than knowledge. Obedience to the Word is taught, modelled and practised.

People hold one another accountable for growing in obedience to the Word and to Christ. When we fail, which we often do, we pray for and encourage one another. There is a lot of Grace, a lot of acceptance and a lot of laughter.

**Q: DOES EACH CHURCH HAVE ITS OWN VISION?**

All church visions ultimately come back to the Great Commission in Matthew 28:18-20. We simply stick to this as our vision and mission statement. What greater mission can we have than the one that Jesus gave us? Jesus tells us to go, to make disciples, to baptise and to teach obedience.

The Simple churches that we see starting up around the nation do this more effectively than the congregational churches that I used to lead before.

**Q: HOW DO YOU DEAL WITH TITHING AND GIVING?**

Our overheads for doing church are very low. Often our teachers, elders and mentors are unpaid, ordinary people. We teach and encourage people to give to the poor, especially to Christian ministries that serve the poor. Every week the groups serve needs amongst one another and sometimes this includes financial giving.

We strongly encourage giving towards church planting. We also encourage honouring elders and teachers financially, according to 1 Timothy 5:17 and Galatians 6:6. This does not always mean paying a salary.

**Q: WHO ARE THE CHURCHES ALIGNED TO?**

Simple churches do not usually align with denominations. Some are completely independent, which is not healthy. Others are aligned to existing congregational churches. The ones we start are mostly connected in networks that align with a church planting team.

Church Planting teams have coaches and mentors. Once a network of churches matures and develops its own leadership, the church planting team will withdraw and act in a mentoring capacity.

**Q: HOW DO PEOPLE JOIN?**

We don't grow churches by adding people. We rather plant new churches. Too much of our Western



Christianity is about trying to grow churches by taking members from other churches. We don't target Christians. If a Christian wants to join us, he or she immediately gets promoted to church planter.

We will assist this person to start a new church by coaching and mentoring the process. We are always on the lookout for workers. Every one of our members prays daily for workers to go into the harvest fields and make disciples of the unchurched (Luke 10:2).

### **Q: ARE CONGREGATIONAL CHURCHES INVOLVED IN PLANTING SIMPLE CHURCHES?**

When we started out planting simple churches from normal congregational life, we thought it would be an easy transition. We discovered the words of Jesus in John 12:24 to be true, "Unless a grain of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it can bear no fruit." We had to die to a lot of Western church culture and personal ambition before we saw the beginnings of a church planting movement. It was not easy.

So if a church and its leadership are prepared to let go of these things, they will be able to see church planting movements birthed. We are partnering with some congregational churches that have a desire to see their communities turn to Christ.

[\[http://www.therealchurch.com/problems\\_in\\_the\\_house\\_church\\_movement.html\]](http://www.therealchurch.com/problems_in_the_house_church_movement.html)

## **THE PROBLEM WITH THE HOUSE CHURCH MOVEMENT AND A SEARCH FOR THE UNITY OF HIS BODY.**

**By Andy Zoppelt**

We in the house church movement in many ways are taking the same path as those in previous movements. We have accurately pointed out the **major** faults and flaws in the institutional church: pastor, pews, programs, buildings, indifference, denominationalism, hierarchy-- the list seems a mile long. We all agree that this institutional system of church is absolutely different from what we read about in the early forming of the body of Christ. It is, without exaggerating, a 180-degree turn from what Jesus and the apostles set up in the early church. At this point we all agree. But have we really looked at the sin in our own camp.

### **Problems that need to be addressed**

**1. The spirit of division.** Most house churches I have visited are quite content in being "us four and no more." Because they are meeting in the shelter of a house, they have turned inward in believing that somehow they are inherently different... even New Testament! Most are having little or no impact on their community, the poor, those in prisons, those in need-- and many are not even impacting missions. They easily have forgotten that even the early house church was never meant to be an end in itself. They have forgotten the responsibility of being connected and functioning locally in the city. They reject others meeting in homes in their same area. We now have micro-division rather than macro-divisions.

Jesus made it clear in John 17 that unity was not an option for His disciples. We are either gathering or scattering, we are either for Him or against Him. We don't have many options if we are truly going to

follow Jesus and keep Him at the center. Each group or leader clutches their group as though it were theirs. Whose church is it? Whose people are we? The people are scattering looking for shepherds after His own heart.

**2. There is a spirit against leadership.** House churches often overreact to the false leadership of the institutional church by denying the biblical need of the five-fold ministry. Their kind of "priesthood of the believer" has denied the ministries function within the body of Christ and denied many of His servants on a universal level. They forget that these ministries are gifts to the church as "God has appointed." (1 Cor. 12:28-29 and Eph. 4:11)

A tremendous price will be paid by denying those whom Jesus sends and anoints. Our individualism and independence have created a false sense of body ministry. Because we deny the diversity of ministry of the universal church, without which we cannot survive in times of shaking, God has withheld from us His power and presence.

Many individuals feel threatened by the experience and revelation of the five-fold ministry and shelter themselves in isolated home meetings. They have forgotten that the diversity of all ministry is not competition but it complements and builds up the body of Christ. This is one reason that the church has such a low level of maturity.

**3. No burden for the needy.** Ministry has almost come to a complete stop in the house church. When I was an institutional pastor, we would go to the streets to minister and feed hundreds of people. Even the city of Fort Lauderdale stood up and took notice; they asked how they could help. The local newspaper did a full 2-page write-up on us. We went into the jails and nursing homes. We were a light on a hill. Now I feel disconnected from my local brothers rather than us pulling together. The only burden we have is what we shall bring for the meal after the meeting. If we don't have His burden, we cannot know His will, nor can we speak for Him.

**4. Giving.** Our anti-tithing doctrine has led to a greed where giving is non-existent. It matters little what we believe concerning the tithing issue if our believing doesn't include giving up our selfish attitude toward our finances to pull together locally and trans-locally. If we don't support the poor, we are worse than the institutional church. Paul mentioned over and over his concern for the poor. Jesus said the ministry to the poor was a sign of one being his sheep. Even John questioned the presence of the Holy Spirit being in a person of indifference in 1 John 3:17-18

We often think of homosexuality as the sin of Sodom and the reason that God destroyed it. "Look, this was the iniquity of your sister Sodom: She and her daughter had pride, fullness of food, and abundance of idleness; neither did she strengthen the hand of the poor and needy. And they were haughty and committed abomination before Me; therefore I took them away as I saw fit." Ezek 16:49-50

**5. Its conventions are about information not building.** Our conventions are no different than the institutional church conventions. We have focused and exalted the prominent speakers to a level of entertainment status. We have experts giving us information while we experience little of the life of the body. Many can't even remember what the speakers have said after the convention. We are more entertained with information expertly presented than a building together. We hope that some holy huddle around a 10-minute break around the table will connect leadership. It is the same old "us four leaders and no more." It becomes exclusive and therefore anti-inclusive. I go to them and feel like a dummy with nothing to add. I feel stupid and am supposed to listen as I sit in my seat as the professionals explain how to do it. I weep and cry to be built with other leaders and am too often disconnected, standing alone. I want to get together in order to pray together, to be one with one another, to share together, to support one another. I am a "lone ranger" in the midst of divisions of every flavor.

When I read the resumes of the speakers, I have flashbacks of institutionalism. Who do we recognize for their suffering, their servant's heart, their loyalty to the sheep? Aren't these the people we need to hear from?

Our meetings are salted with information, strategies, how-to methods, and the spread of house churches. Does this not have the sound of institutional program-ism? We hear much about the why's, how's, and what-to-do in house churches--but we are void of any establishment of being built together and of leaders being reconnected in the body of Christ... true restoration. It pains me to think of all those house churches disconnected in any given locality. Should we not build and not just inform? Is not building an apostolic mandate?

**6. a universal disconnect.** The universal church, as it is often called, is the unity that gave the early church meaning and power. Without power we are forced to form. Because there is no recognition of the church in the city, there is no understanding of the universal church and the need for universal ministry. The early church started out as a universal church among 120 persons. As it grew, it maintained its universal identity. The church functioned in houses and cities but maintained its identity in universal unity. Leadership was not established in house churches but in the city and in the universal church. Every house church didn't have an elder; but the eldership functioned locally in the city much like Israel. Because there was a universal unity, much of the five-fold ministry could function locally and universally. There were letters from city to city to keep them informed and in communication with one another. There was a body that was connected. Disconnection brings about death. All we need to do is look at our physical bodies for a moment; it has a lot to tell us about being connected and the death that results from being disconnected. How long does it take for a member being separated from the body before it's too late to be reconnected? We need more connection not information.

**7. Seeing the house church as the end.** Somehow we see the house church in the New Testament as central to changing the world rather than Jesus. In past years I have seen and experienced church emphasis on many issues: Community, government, gifts, repentance, five-fold ministries, discipleship, evangelism ... and now the house church movement. The circle of teaching, books, conventions and strategies surround the emphasis. We have come to think that it was the house that changed the world, and we have made it an end.

**8. Denominationalism.** This is a curse word to those of us who experienced the horrific divisions and competition created out of "naming" a Christian movement. Denominations got their start around some biblical truth or some person. Denominate means "to name". Rarely are we content with just being Christian; we somehow want to name our special movement and separate ourselves from all those who are of "Babylon." It is the name of Jesus that identifies us, not our network. We have subtly fallen into the previous entrapments, which we learned from the institutional church (Babylon) and created streams and networks. We want to box our move under something we can identify as being "us" exclusively. Now, no one will admit this but, the fruit reveals the root of our denominational affiliation. It is a "**let-us** build" kind of heresy. When the Assemblies of God started around the early part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, it wanted to join the divided Pentecostal movement. Today the Assemblies of God is just another denomination among many. What do we think will happen with all our streams and networks? They to will be become another denomination with a label. Comenius says, "The great number of teachers is the reason of the multitude of sects, for which we shall soon have no names left..."

Where did this come from? Gen 11:1, 4... 'Come, **let us** build ourselves a city, and a tower whose top is in the heavens; **let us** make a name (denomination) for ourselves, lest **we** be scattered abroad over the face of the whole earth."

It was the first inclination of Peter when he saw Jesus speaking with Moses and Elijah: "Then Peter answered and said to Jesus, 'Rabbi, it is good for us to be here; and **let us** make three tabernacles: one

for You, one for Moses, and one for Elijah"

I can hear it now, "Which tabernacle do you go to?" Once we name it, we divide it. For years I heard these defensive excuses: "We are just setting up networks to ..." and then they go on to explain. I just can't see Apollos coming into a city and leading a number of people to the Lord and then setting up a network or stream-sourcing to his apostolic ministry. Denominationalism comes in many forms. If we are of the same carnal nature as the denominationalist, we will find a way to create a name without looking and feeling denominational. In the discipleship movement we found a way to appear non-denominational-- we called our divisions "streams." In that way we could identify who it is we were "under". Later in the restoration movement we created "networks;" names were given to each network and we related to specific leaders, apostles... whatever. The results are the same. We take something that doesn't belong to us and we put our label on it in order to control it and identify with it. Mankind naturally likes names and titles. So in order to build, we need a name. The name identifies who we are and our group; natural successes give us a sense of achievement that we could not achieve individually. There is power in numbers and recognition in names.

**9. False Identification.** I keep hearing how we in the house church movement are the largest movement in the world. We use China and others in the third world nations to make this point. But there is no comparison between them and us. I met a brother from China a few years ago; his word to me was that we didn't have life, we had form. We have accomplished a form without life... if we dare to be honest. We are not the same as many in the third world nation. They are not what they are because they meet in houses, but because they have life... Maybe we need to identify with their life and not their house meetings.

**10. Numbers:** When God sent me into the institutional church as a youth pastor, I learned a powerful inside lesson: it was all about success and numbers. We can't get away from success and numbers. When I go to a house church convention, I hear, "How many house churches have you planted?" or "How many are in your house church?" Whoever has planted the most house churches or has the most successful house church is placed on a pedestal. Is that different from the institution? Many real five-fold ministries cannot become manifest if we continue to judge by such a narrow standard.

**11. There is no room for a strong word.** We organize till we paralyze. We have created a comfortable environment and a box, which we protect with tooth and claw. Institutionalism is based on organizing to the point where God has no place for moving outside the program or box. I am convinced we need a good strong and hard word now and then. A famous man of God once said, "If you have not gotten a hard word from God, I doubt that you know Him."

I remember one time I invited Art Katz to speak in our church; he blasted us and pointed out every problem. I must say, I loved it. We need to make room for others to speak into what we are doing. Conventions are afraid that "confusion" might set in if such a place is made for this to happen. But we admit that in our local house church meetings we face many hard issues all the time. I had times I wanted to close down the meeting and get with God alone, but if I did, I would have missed the life that comes from confrontation and conflict. Do we organize house churches to end any confusion? No, because to the patient, it is fertile soil to grow.

**12. Where do we go from here?** If the power of Pentecost was because of the disciples of Jesus and the unity of the body coming together, just maybe we should consider such a humbling position. Let us throw away our differences and come together and pray, fast, and serve one another. Let us let God put us together, build us together. Let us fall in love with Him and one another--no matter how long it takes and no matter what it takes. We cannot dodge such important issues as love, unity and fellowship. Without love we all are nothing and are building on sinking sand. If we don't learn from history, we will repeat it.

So who am I to make such a request to other leaders? I am nobody, so let's get me out of the picture, something we often don't do, and let's consider a real restoration of the body of Christ. I know that this is the cry of many leaders to whom I have talked and written.

The suggestion I have heard from many is that we meet together and talk first. Then, if God leads, maybe we could have some real weeping between the porch and the altar and repent (Joel 2). Maybe God would give us a prophetic word, where we could sound the alarm on His holy mountain. We need to blow the trumpet with a clear warning and a true word from God in this day of shaking. Let us come together-- because it is good for the brethren to dwell together in unity. It is there He proclaims the blessing... something we all need. Let the Lord separate the wheat from the chaff, but let those who are willing in the day of His power come together.

Dare we come together in unity and build upon Jesus?

[\[http://www.gotquestions.org/simple-church.html\]](http://www.gotquestions.org/simple-church.html)

## Question: "What is the Simple Church movement? Is it biblical?"

**Answer:** The "Simple Church" movement is basically a move to make the modern day church experience as close to the early churches of the New Testament as possible. Adherents to the Simple Church movement would say that early believers met in people's homes and their worship had very little structure, and they therefore believe in doing the same. The Simple Church movement advocates believe that we are to be led by the Spirit in all that we do and that a 'return to basics' is needed because so many structures and traditions have polluted the church experience.

A "simple church" may meet anywhere with or without trained leaders, formal liturgy, programs, or structures. Like many "house churches," a simple church is usually a small group of no more than 20-25 persons. The term "simple church" is often used interchangeably with other terms like organic church, essential church, primitive church, relational church, and micro-church. All have in common a rejection of larger churches organized along denominational lines, formal leadership, church buildings, and formal worship services. Emphasis in simple churches is on building relationships within the small group and missionary outreach.

Perhaps the primary problem with the Simple Church movement, and the house church movement in general, is that they see the book of Acts as a model for the church, which it was never intended to be. The book of Acts is the *history* of the early church, not a mandate for church structure throughout the ages. Acts is "descriptive" in that it describes the early church, but is not always "prescriptive" in that it is not always stating how things are supposed to be. The books of 1 Timothy and Titus give specific outlines for [church government](#). The Lord was very clear in His Word about how He wishes His church on earth to be organized and managed, with Christ as the head of the church and its supreme authority ([Ephesians 1:22; 4:15; Colossians 1:18](#)), and governed by spiritual leadership consisting of two main offices—elders and deacons. When simple churches decry the establishment of leadership within the church, they reject God's plan for the local church, rather than affirming it, as they claim.

A few other things seem to be overlooked within this movement as a whole. Limiting the churches to a few families or a small number of people is not mandated in the Bible. We know from [Acts 2:47](#) that the church grew daily. We also know from studying the Corinthian letters that people began to organize as larger bodies to come together to worship together. We also know from Corinthians that this larger congregation of believers had some very significant problems that had to be dealt with, which would seem to reiterate the need for godly leadership

within the body. There is nothing unscriptural about a large church and nothing to indicate that small groups meeting in a home are any more in tune with a biblical model than a church of 10,000.

In addition, some critics are concerned about doctrinal purity and accountability in the Simple Church movement. The Holy Spirit is ultimately the one responsible for ensuring purity within the worldwide church body, but God has given us the model for local churches structured under the leadership of godly elders and deacons. Yet God can certainly work both within a formal religious structure and in the midst of believers gathering in someone's home. As with all things, Christian love and acceptance is the rule to follow. Those who "are not against us are for us" ([Mark 9:40](#)), and whether we worship in large cathedrals or small home gatherings, the important thing is the proclamation of the gospel of Jesus Christ to a lost world, the upholding of the Word of God as the sufficient model for faith and practice, and the love we have for one another.

[\[http://www.neednotfret.com/content/view/41/70\]](http://www.neednotfret.com/content/view/41/70)

## WHAT'S SO GREAT ABOUT HOUSE CHURCH?

### **Are house churches biblical?**

To answer this question, we have to ask, *What is a church?* In Mt 18:20, Jesus said in the context of discipline and restoration, "For where two or three have gathered together in my name, there I am in their midst." While Christ is always in the midst of his people, this verse teaches that there's something special about believers gathering in the name of Jesus. A church is a group of believers who gather in the name of Jesus, and as we've said, who perceive themselves as a church.

...

### **Why do we need more churches?**

The truth is, the longer a church exists the harder it is to win new converts to Christ. Larry Kreider says, ". . . if a church is ten or more years old, it takes 85 people to lead one person to Christ. If the church is 4-7 years old, it takes seven people to lead one person to Christ. If a church is less than 3 years old, it takes only three people to lead one to Christ" (73). So, yes, there is a serious need for more churches. But not all of those churches need to be institutional churches.

...

### **Does house church really work?**

The real issue is always whether a particular method is biblical not whether it works. If it's biblical, it will work, even if slower than we would like. We should never want to do something just because it gets results; the results we're seeing may not be biblical results.

### **Who are house churches trying to reach?**

House churches are an excellent way to turn non-believers into followers of Christ. House churches provide an opportunity to transform groups into churches rather than a place for Christian transferees to temporarily stop in. Some statistics show that 80% of non-believers who attend a small group, like a house church or Bible study, become Christians. This conversion ratio is one of the big reasons why we should utilize house churches. We need both the house church and the institutional church. And we need all Bible-believing denominations working together.

# My Gripes About the House Church Movement

## by Andrew Jones

People leave the church as turtles or skunks...Turtles crawl quietly out the back door, without bringing attention to the protest of their silent withdrawal. Skunks leave at the front, where everyone can see them, where they can let everyone know how badly they will be missed, how they should have been listened to. They leave a smell behind that lasts a lifetime. A stinky reminder of the decision that divided...

These were another group. Not skunks or turtles. Another. Butterflies, perhaps. No rebellion. No scars. No issues with ecclesiastical entities. Just people who liked to live with each other in each others context. Environments with wallpaper and photos and TV magazines. Lives located somewhere. Homes where people live and children pick their noses and dogs annoy. Real people who want to see deeply into each other's lives. To delight in the beauty. To heal what is broken. To be healed. Touched. Appreciated but not used. Perhaps these people are the third wave. People who church together without contrasting. Part of a church without an address. A movement without a label . For they do not always call what they do "house church". Sometimes there is no house. Even "home church" does not contain their experience of God and each other in this covenanted journey.

## Concern Summary

- Some within the simple church movement believe the Bible shows this model as the most valid form of church, even the original intention of God.
  - One particularly destructive modernist doctrine that has flourished over the past two decades is that of the “house church only” movement. These people adamantly teach that churches should only meet in the houses of Christians. Church buildings and common areas of worship are wasteful and worldly, they say, claiming that the early churches only met in peoples' homes.
  - J. Lee Grady (Charisma Online Editor) says such a movement wants to "reinvent the church without its biblical structure and New Testament order — and without the necessary people who are anointed and appointed by God to lead it. To follow this defective thesis to its logical conclusion would require us to fire all pastors, close all seminaries and Bible colleges, padlock our sanctuaries and send everybody home..."
  - Grady and other critics worry that the simple church movement could encourage people to leave more traditional forms of church, which could lead to further collapse or decline of Christendom.
- 
- **Leadership**
  - **Longevity**
  - **Orthodoxy**
  - **Teaching**
  - **Outreach potential**
  - **Relationship with established churches**

- **Cultural accommodation/syncretism**

1. **The spirit of division.**
2. **There is a spirit against leadership**
3. **No burden for the needy.**
4. **Giving.**
5. **Its conventions are about information not building.**
6. **A universal disconnect.**
7. **Seeing the house church as the end.**
8. **Denominationalism.**
9. **False Identification.**
10. **Numbers.**
11. **There is no room for a strong word.**
12. **Where do we go from here?**

- Perhaps the primary problem with the Simple Church movement, and the house church movement in general, is that they see the book of Acts as a model for the church, which it was never intended to be. The book of Acts is the *history* of the early church, not a mandate for church structure throughout the ages. Acts is “descriptive” in that it describes the early church, but is not always “prescriptive” in that it is not always stating how things are supposed to be.
- First, any time a group gets closer to one another, there's the possibility for greater conflict.
- Secondly, with a house church comes the possibility of bonding so well that newcomers can't integrate.
- Thirdly, some folks will not want the intimacies and vulnerabilities that come with small groups because people can't be anonymous in house churches.
- **What about heresy?**
- **How will children be ministered to in a house church?**
- **Who is qualified to start a house church?**

“Acts 2:42-47 seems to indicate that first-century believers worshipped in each other's houses.”

Oh really?

## **Acts 2:42-47 (New Living Translation)**

### **The Believers Form a Community**

*All the believers devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching, and to fellowship, and to sharing in meals (including the Lord's Supper), and to prayer.*

*A deep sense of awe came over them all, and the apostles performed many miraculous signs and wonders. And all the believers met together in one place and shared everything they had. They sold their property and possessions and shared the money with those in need. They worshiped together at*



*the Temple each day, met in homes for the Lord's Supper, and shared their meals with great joy and generosity—all the while praising God and enjoying the goodwill of all the people. And each day the Lord added to their fellowship those who were being saved.*