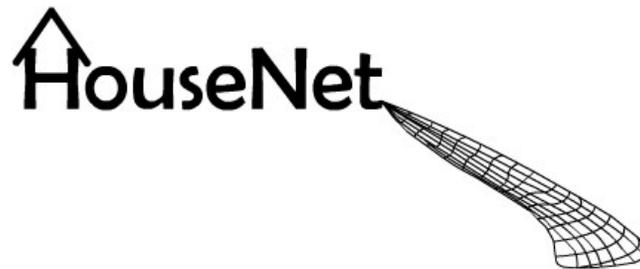


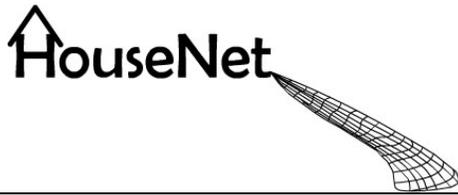
# The House Church Manual

For The Rock Christian Church and Beyond



by  
William Tenny-Brittian

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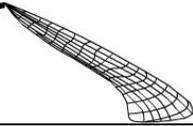


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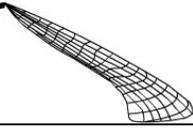
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## Chapter 1

### House Church Network Basic Training

What is a House Church? What does one look like? How do they work? Although the House Church is the only church model described in the Bible, it fell into obscurity in the Euro-American culture. Although they flourished elsewhere in the world, especially in India, China, Southeast Asia, and Africa, they hardly got a mention in North America. Until recently. Over the past couple of decades, House Churches have begun to make a resurgence in our culture. Mostly underground, these emerging churches have quietly begun to root, sprout, and propagate. There are no good statistics on how many House Churches there are in the U.S., but estimates run from the thousands to the ten-thousands. The fact is, in a culture that's losing three thousand people from the faith—not the church, *the faith*—every single day,<sup>1</sup> one of our best hopes may be a resurgence of the biblical model.

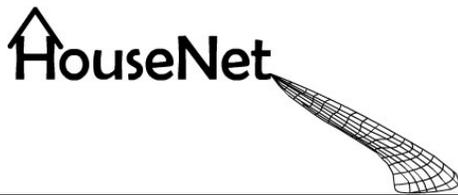
This manual was written not only to answer these questions, but to provide a step-by-step guide for starting, growing, and multiplying a House Church and a House Church Network.

A House Church is the body of Christ that meets in homes. Nothing more and nothing less. Believers and their friends, neighbors, and acquaintances gathered in someone's home to pray, worship, break bread, and grow into fully committed disciples of Jesus. House Churches tend to be small and intimate—in a House Church, everyone really *does* know your name, or soon will. A typical House Church has between six to

**A House Church is the body of Christ that meets in home. Nothing more and nothing less.**

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<sup>1</sup> Tom Clegg, *Lost in America* (Loveland, CO: Group Publishing, 2001), 28.



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thirty people involved, depending on the size of the home, and because they are small, House Churches are able to mobilize more quickly to respond when someone is in need.

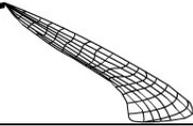
House Church worship can look as varied as the houses in which they meet. Some House Churches begin or end with a meal. Some sing hymns, songs, and praises accompanied by a guitar, or a piano, or a keyboard, or they sing along with a CD, DVD, or tape. Others sing a capella and some don't have a time for singing at all. The Bible study may be a sermon or, more often, an interactive discussion. Prayer is a key part to all House Churches, since the participants come know each other well, they depend on the prayers of their church and they see great things happen when prayers are lifted on their behalf.

But why House Church? Aren't there enough churches already? Why start something new?

The first reason is because the House Church is the only type of church mentioned in the New Testament. This doesn't make the House Church the only type of church blessed by God, but it does make it the only form that comes with what might be called a biblical instruction manual and it's certainly the only model the biblical writers produced any information for. Between the birth of the church in about 30 AD and the institutionalization of the church by Constantine in 312, the church primarily existed in homes and during that time managed to become one of the known world's fastest growing religions from Africa to Asia and Europe. The House Church efficiently evangelized their neighborhoods, towns, cities, and regions because of their simplicity and their efficient ability to reproduce more House Churches.

**The House Church is the only type of church mentioned in the New Testament.**

Another reason to consider starting House Churches is because the Institutional Church in the U.S. is in trouble. According to Tom Clegg, the Western culture is the only culture where Christianity is an endangered species—we're the only one loosing



more people from the church than we're gaining.<sup>2</sup> In fact, the church in America is losing more than three-million people each year<sup>3</sup> and we're closing three times the number of churches than we're opening.<sup>4</sup>

So, what's wrong with the Institutional Church? Why aren't we winning the world for Jesus? Perhaps because we've become inefficient when it comes to evangelism. Thom Rainer in *Surprising Insights from the Unchurched* reports that it takes the combined efforts of eighty-five Christians over the period of one-year to produce one convert to the faith.<sup>5</sup> Worse yet, according to the *World Christian Encyclopedia*, the Institutional Church spends \$1,551,466 for each new convert<sup>6</sup> (I'll take that in cash, thank you!).

On the other hand, almost everywhere else in the world the church is doing just fine. In Africa, the church is increasing by twenty-thousand each day. Fifteen-thousand become Christians daily in India. Worldwide, Christianity is growing at a rate of ninety-thousand believers each day.<sup>7</sup> Why the disparaging difference? What is it about the world church that is fueling its growth?

Although there are several elements common to these fast growing movements, no element is more prominent than the fact that each of these movements is related to the House Church Movement. Those who have studied these movements claim they are so effective in reaching people for Jesus because they are relational, they are prayer and biblically focused, and they are led by ordinary, everyday, people rather than seminary trained, church specialists. When a movement is led by the participants, there is a sharing of the leadership and a sharing of resources. There are no experts, so everyone's input and help is vital to accomplishing whatever task lies before them, whether that's leading

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<sup>2</sup>Ibid, 25.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid, 30.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> Clegg, 29.

<sup>6</sup> In "A Vroom with a View," *House2House*, 6:2002, 34.

<sup>7</sup> Clegg, 26.

public worship, ministering to the neighborhood, or hosting a Matthew Party. And when everything is shared, the church comes to look much like the New Testament church.

In a culture that's craving meaning and meaningful relationships, the House Church Movement is both structured and poised to meet those needs. In a nation where less than forty percent of the people are connected with the institutional church, where Christianity is one of the fastest *shrinking* religions, and where churches are closing faster than they're opening, the structure of the House Church offers hope to those who may never otherwise hear the Good News of Jesus Christ.

### **What is a House Church Network?**

Before we define what a House Church Network is, it would be helpful to know what a House Church Network isn't. In the previous section we defined a House Church as a small body of believers and their friends, neighbors, and acquaintances gathered in someone's home to worship, break bread, and grow into fully committed disciples of Jesus. Whereas most House Churches in the world are almost totally independent from each other, a House Church Network cooperates with a larger fellowship to accomplish tasks, mission, and ministries that an individual House Church could not hope to do.

The closest thing to a House Church Network is a cell church. A cell church is a small body of believers who primarily meet in homes, but are linked to one another as a part of a larger, single church.

Probably the best known cell church is the Yoido Full Gospel Church in Seoul, Korea, pastored by Yongi Cho. The Yoido Church has over 800,000 members as of this writing,<sup>8</sup> virtually all of whom are involved in a local cell group.

Cell churches have a lot to offer. For one, they are structured for significant evangelistic growth. The Yoido Church has been bringing thousands to Jesus each year because, like a House Church, the cell church is focused around relationships. And, because all the cell groups associate with one another, the cell church is able to

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<sup>8</sup> *Adherants.com*. Article accessed online. Available from [http://www.adherents.com/Na\\_651.html](http://www.adherents.com/Na_651.html). Accessed 03 July 2002.

accomplish exciting ministries and missions. The cell church also has a central pastor who casts the vision for the church and helps set the tone and the direction for the work of the wider church.

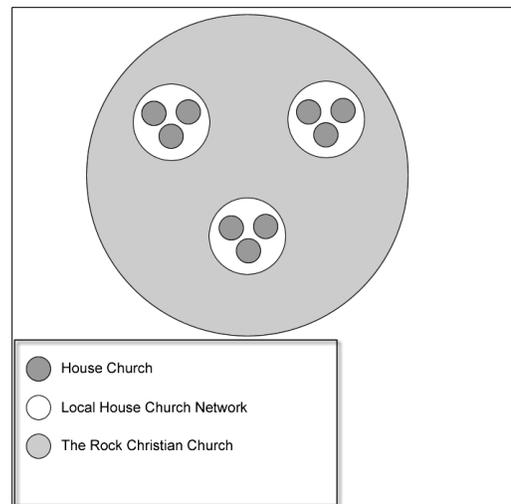
However, there are a few weaknesses of the cell church as well. For one, a cell church is geographically fixed in one location, that is, if a cell church in Seattle wants to start another one in Minneapolis, it would literally have to start over with a specially trained cell church pastor and other leaders to provide the needed structure and administration for such an endeavor.

Another difficulty, as seen in Pastor Cho’s church in Seoul, is that the potential for such a large church membership can create difficulties in providing a meeting place. Recently, the Yoido Church held a leadership conference for its cell leaders and apprentices. To accommodate all their leaders, the Yoido Church had to rent the Seoul Olympic Stadium at no little expense!<sup>9</sup>

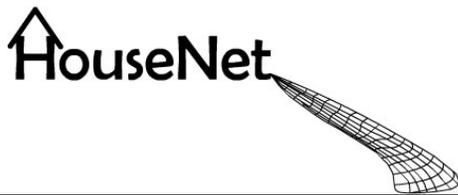
So, what is a House Church Network?

Briefly, a House Church Network may be defined as a network of House Churches, related by geography or affinity, who share a common vision, mission, and values, and cluster together for cooperative ventures, mutual accountability, and who may be a part of a wider fellowship of House Church Networks.

In the House Church Network, each House Church is related to other *local* House Churches within a single Network. Within their Network, the local House Churches get together on a regular basis for a joint, public worship. By joining together monthly or so, the Network is able to rent



<sup>9</sup> Fred Kropp, City Church, Redmond, WA. Personal conversation, 01 November 2001.



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or borrow existing space for the Celebration, thus eliminating the need for maintaining a building.

Additionally, every local Network is related to other Networks through a wider fellowship so that together they can accomplish local, regional, and even national or international ministries and missions.

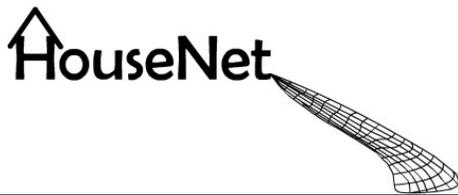
There are a number of strengths to this structure. For one, like both the independent house and the cell church, the House Church Network is structured for rapid reproduction of both disciples and churches. The Network also has the advantage of sharing mutual accountability with other House Churches in the Network as well as within the wider fellowship.

**The House Church Network is structured for rapid reproduction of both disciples and churches.**

And yet, each House Church enjoys the freedom of relative independence within the mission, vision, and values. Additionally, because of the associated Networks, the House Church Network has the ability to reproduce across geo-political boundaries, thus a single House Church could conceivably send one of their own to a distant town (or await a Boeing transfer) to begin a House Church that could become the seed for a new Network and is able to enjoy the accountability and support from the wider Association. Additionally, like the cell church, Networked House Churches are encouraged to meet together for a joint public Worship Celebration on a regular basis; unlike the cell church, the House Church Network provides for reproduction of the Networks themselves, thus the need for an *extraordinarily* large meeting space is negated.

## **The House Church Network DNA**

The House Church Network's DNA is what separates the House Church Network from all other house church organizations. Just as a living organism's DNA contains the genetic code necessary to create a duplicate organism, so the Network DNA can be defined as the building blocks of faith, belief, values, and behaviors that shape each House Church throughout the Network with a similar disposition and focus. These



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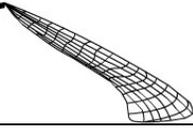
building blocks are the Mission, the Vision, the Values, and the BedRock Beliefs & Behaviors that are held in common across the organization's breadth.

1. The **Mission** of the House Church Network is: *"To connect people to God and help them to become fully developed disciples of Jesus Christ."* The Great Commission in Matthew 28:19-20 commands the church to make disciples and we believe this is the key to the very purpose of the church.
2. The **Vision** of the House Church Network is: "To change the face of the United States and beyond by supporting and building a House Church Planting Movement."
3. The **Values** of the House Church Network are:
  - **Radical Hospitality** that welcomes everyone as a guest of Jesus and is welcome to visit, explore, worship, celebrate, and participate in House Church, the House Church Network, and any wider House Church Network fellowship events.
  - **Indigenous worship** in all our communications, teaching, and technology.
  - **Authentic Prayer** that bathes everything we do.
  - **Real Relationships** that go beyond friendliness to friendship.
  - **Multiplication** of disciples and churches.
  - **Fellowships** of the saints and the sinners in small and large group gatherings.
  - **Meaningful Accountability** to insure that Christians bring honor to the name of Jesus.
  - **Empowerment by the Word.**
4. The **BedRock Beliefs** of the House Church Network are the non-negotiables of the faith—the *fundamentals* if you will. We call them the Kingdom Issues. We have a saying, "If it's not a Kingdom Issue, then it might be good for a discussion, but we're not going to argue about it." Our BedRock Beliefs are summed up in the statement "Jesus and the Four Greats."

The DNA of The House Church Network is the Mission, the Vision, the Values, and the BedRock Beliefs & Behaviors that are held in common across the organization's breadth.

*Jesus is the living Son of God and we accept Him as our Savior and Lord; He gave us the Four Greats:*

- **The Great Invitation:** "Follow me" (Mark 1:17; Matthew 16:24).



- **The First Great Commandment:** “Love the Lord your God with all your mind, with all your heart, and with all your strength” (Mark 12:30).
  - **The Second Great Commandment:** “Love your neighbor as I have loved you” John 13:34).
  - **The Great Commission:** “Go and make disciples of all the world” (Matthew 28:19-20).
5. **The BedRock Behaviors** spring from the BedRock Beliefs, the Values, the Vision, and the Mission of the House Church Network, since it is by these that we live and breathe and have our being. The BedRock Behaviors of the House Church Network include a commitment to:

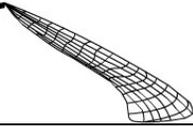
Worship weekly and pray and meditate on the Scriptures daily;  
Attend and support my House Church;  
Tithe my time, talents, and treasures;  
Exercise my spiritual gifts and talents for ministry;  
Reproduce disciples for the Kingdom of God;  
Strive to be like Jesus in every area of my life.

Every House Church Planter/Pastor, apprentice, and House Church leader who is associated with the House Church Network is expected to ascribe, believe, and behave within these guidelines. It is the responsibility of each House Church, Network, and the wider fellowship of House Church Networks to hold each other accountable to these, the building blocks of the House Church Network.

### **The Five Purposes of the Church**

As far as the American church is concerned, few would argue that the most influential book to come out in the late twentieth century is probably Rick Warren’s *The Purpose Driven Church*. In his book, Rick suggests that Jesus gave us five biblical purposes for the church. He finds these purposes outlined in the two Great Commandments (Matthew 22:37-40) and the Great Commission (Matthew 28:19-20):

1. Love the Lord with your heart: The church expresses this purpose through worship.
2. Love your neighbor as yourself: The church demonstrates this purpose through service in ministry.
3. Go and make disciples: The church accomplishes this through evangelism.



4. Baptize them: Since baptism is a rite of passage into the church, Warren understands this command as a mandate to become a member of a church and to build relationships through fellowship with other believers.
5. Teach them to obey all that I have commanded: The church expresses this command by training and equipping people to be fully committed disciples of Jesus.<sup>10</sup>

These Five Purposes can also be found implicitly demonstrated in the first description we have of the New Testament church in Acts 2:42-47. There we find the new believers learning diligently from the apostles, taking time to

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

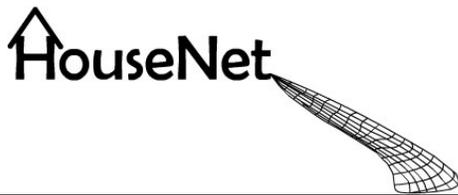
worship, spending time together eating and fellowshiping, spending time with their neighbors, and doing good works and sharing in ministry with each other.

Today, the understanding of the Five Purposes has gained wide acceptance from the church around the world. Indeed, the German scholar Christian Schwarz, who studied thousands of growing churches around the world, pointed out in *Natural Church Development*, a church that is healthy, that accomplishes its purposes, cannot help but to grow.<sup>11</sup>

Because these five purposes are so important to the health of the church, it is clear that every church, including each House Church, should insure all Five Purposes are being accomplished. Although other chapters of this manual deal are dedicated specifically to each of these purposes, a typical House Church might accomplish the Five Purposes in any number of ways.

<sup>10</sup> Rick Warren, *The Purpose Driven Church* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1995), 103-107.

<sup>11</sup> Christian A. Schwarz, *Natural Church Development* (Carol Stream, IL: ChurchSmart Resources, 1996), 12.



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**Worship:** Each week the House Church meets for worship together.

**Outreach Evangelism:** Each week the House Church may pray together for specific individuals to become Christians; they may invite unbelievers into their home fellowships, or take other measures to share their faith collectively and individually with those God puts in their paths.

**Relationship Building:** Each week the House Church may host a potluck meal and encourage a time of fellowship and sharing.

**Discipleship:** Each week the House Church not only studies the Bible during the worship, but each participant is encouraged to be a part of a Life Transformation Group.<sup>12</sup>

**Service:** Each week the House Church may be a part of an ongoing service opportunity such as volunteering at the local food bank, offering services to the neighborhood, or Prayer Walking through the neighborhood and responding to people's needs.<sup>13</sup>

## The Five Purposes of the Church

**Worship**  
**Outreach Evangelism**  
**Relationship Building**  
**Discipleship**  
**Service**

When a church is faithful in accomplishing the Five Purposes, the church will see people coming to Jesus and the church will grow and reproduce, just as the House Churches around the world are doing even now.

## Starting a House Church

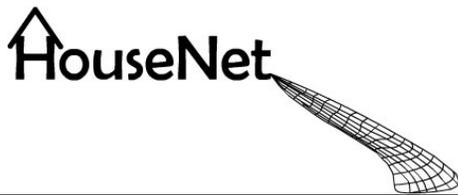
In the Institutional Church there has long been a mystique about planting churches. You had to be formally assessed to see if you had the right “personality” for the job, you had to attend special schools, and so on. But the reality is this: Any believer can be a church planter. In India, one elderly man became a Christian and started forty-two churches in his first year.<sup>14</sup> There's nothing magical about starting a church and indeed, in some movements, it is expected that *each* Christian will host a church in their home.<sup>15</sup>

<sup>12</sup> See *Discipleship Development*, pg. XX for information on Life Transformation Groups.

<sup>13</sup> See *Outreach Evangelism* pg. XX for information on Prayer Walking.

<sup>14</sup> David Garrison, *Church Planting Movements* (Richmond, VA: International Mission Board of the Southern Baptist Convention, 1999), 32.

<sup>15</sup> Joel Comiskey, *Groups of 12: A New Way to Mobilize Leaders and Multiply Groups in Your Church* (Houston: Touch Publications, 1999), 55.



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There are about as many ways of starting a House Church as there are houses in a subdivision. However, below are a number of ways to get started:

## 1. Begin with Your Network

One of the most effective ways to begin a House Church is to begin with your own **F**riends, **R**elatives, **A**ssociates, and **N**eighbors Network, your FRAN Network. To do this effectively, invite three individuals or couples to the host home for a Show-Me Event. Show-Me Events are short introductions to House Church and to the House Church Network.<sup>16</sup> Serve a meal and introduce them to the House Church concept, perhaps even adding music or some of the House Church activities that you intend to incorporate during worship.

**There's nothing magical about starting a church and indeed, in some movements, it is expected that *each* Christian will host a church in their home.**

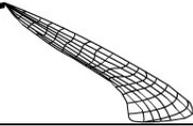
When you've finished sharing, invite questions and discussion. Then ask those who are interested to invite two individuals or couples to the next week for another Show-Me Event. However, this time plan on introducing elements of worship during the event and finishing up with the House Church presentation. Again, these House Church events should include a meal time that encourages informality and fellowship. At the end of the evening, invite the families to return the following week for a full House Church worship service and encourage them to bring someone from their own FRAN Network. This method of starting a House Church has proven to be one of the most effective and efficient models for starting a new House Church.

## 2. Invite Your FRAN Network to a Model House Church

If you live in a region with an existing House Church Network, starting a new House Church may be as simple as inviting your Friends, Relatives, Associates, or Neighbors to visit a Model House Church<sup>17</sup> with you. Healthy existing House Churches are an excellent resource for emerging House Church leaders because they demonstrate both the excitement and commitment of sold-out disciples of Jesus. People who visit a Model House Church for the first time are so enamored with the experience that they are often willing to help start one in their community or neighborhood. After accompanying members of your FRAN Network to a Model House Church, share your vision of starting a House Church on your ride home with them. Iron out the details of when and where and then begin with either a Matthew Party or with another start-up method.

<sup>16</sup> CDs and brochures are available from the House Church Network Association office.

<sup>17</sup> A model House Church is a House Church that demonstrates its health by exuberantly accomplishing the five purposes of a church. Model House Churches tend to be grace filled, exciting places to visit because they focus on discipleship making.



### 3. Host a Matthew Party

Matthew Parties are based on Luke 5:27-29. When Matthew met Jesus for the first time, he threw a party for all his friends and associates so they could meet Jesus too. You can hold a Matthew Party by getting together with your neighbors and friends and just getting to know them. Spend time finding out their Christian affiliation—the odds are most of them will have none. What you do next will depend on your personality. You can simply invite them over to your house for a Bible study on some topic they'd like to explore (try one on leadership, business, parenting, marriage, or ??) and when they come over, begin with a meal, haul out the old guitar or a sing-along CD and voila—House Church happens. If this seems too bold, ask your unchurched neighbors and friends what sort of things they're interested in and then find a Bible study that matches their interest and then find out if they'd be interested.<sup>18</sup> In any event, a Matthew Party is based on building relationships through your FRAN network and then inviting them to explore the Bible, their faith, prayer, or all of the above in a safe and sane environment.

### 4. Start a Bible Study

It isn't politically incorrect to talk spirituality in the workplace or the leisure places anymore, so take advantage of it. Talk to your FRAN network about getting together for a regular Bible study. Perhaps they will want to study through a book in the Bible. Or maybe they would be interested in a study on what the Bible has to say about finances, ethics, or dating. Whatever the method, the study begins by discovering their interest and then meeting that curiosity.

### 5. Expand a Life Transformation Group

If you're in a Life Transformation Group (LTG) then you're in the perfect place to begin a House Church. You can begin to build a House Church from your LTG by simply expanding the number of LTGs you are a part of. For instance, if you are currently in one LTG with two friends, consider starting another one totally separate from the first. Do this again and you have between two and four people who really do need a church. So invite them and their families to a meal and a worship at your home. If your friends are married, you could have a houseful to begin with.

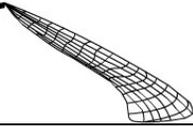
### 6. Host a Breakfast (or any event!) for the Neighborhood Kids

Tony and Felicity Dale, House Church planters in Texas, came up with this one.<sup>19</sup> The neighborhood they lived in had lots of children, and they wanted to reach the

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<sup>18</sup> The *Serendipity Bible* offers a number of six week topical studies that may be of interest to visitors.

<sup>19</sup> Felicity Dale, ed. *Getting Started: Planting and Multiplying House Churches* (Austin, TX: House2House, 2002), 82-83.



unchurched, so they decided to host a hot breakfast on Sunday mornings for the neighborhood. They figured that most of the Christians would be in church at that time, so they would be able to focus on the unreached. They had their own children invite all the neighborhood kids for a Breakfast Bible Club. The children came and over time some of them became Christians and began bringing their parents. Voila—a House Church.

## 7. Host an Alpha Group

The Alpha Course is an introduction to Christianity and has gained popularity around the world. The course is a ten week study beginning with the question, “Christianity: Boring, Untrue, and Irrelevant?” Alpha is designed to be hosted over a sit-down meal and may be done as a speaker driven course (you teach it), or a video course (pop in the forty-five minute video and discuss it afterwards). To begin a House Church with Alpha, get the materials (House Church Network member churches can borrow the videos and/or leader’s guide from the Lending Library), invite participants from your FRAN network, though you may decide to advertise the event as well, set a date and begin. When the course is complete, invite the participants to continue coming to your home for worship. You can find more about the Alpha Course at [www.alphana.org](http://www.alphana.org).

## 8. Begin Small and Build

Another way to start a House Church is to talk up the idea among your friends. Every time you see someone’s eyes “light up,” begin recruiting them to start the House Church with you. When you have a couple of folks, go ahead and begin. In this kind of start, it will be especially important to emphasize inviting others and to achieve *all* of the Five Purposes of the church so that the new venture doesn’t become home-bound.

## 9. Begin a Discussion Group

Contrary to popular concerns, reading hasn’t yet gone out of vogue. Regularly as many of 50% of the best sellers on the non-fiction list are self-help and spiritual in nature and this offers an exciting opportunity for starting neighborhood discussion groups. Try choosing a book that either reflects Christian values or will offer the opportunity to introduce these values into the discussion. Look for openings to share pieces of your faith journey as you meet together. As you build relationships and share your faith, begin to introduce prayer and worship.

And for those who aren’t into reading, discussion groups formed around movies work well too. Just keep the movie appropriate to the setting and to the participants.

## 10. Other Ways

Like we said at the beginning of this section, there are probably as many ways to start a House Church as there are houses in a subdivision. Here are some other quick ideas: host a booth at a county fair, festival, or event and tell people about your new House Church; run an ad in the local newspaper or classifieds' paper; start a Bible study at work; or invite local business people to a study of leadership principles in the Bible.

### House Church Leadership

As a new House Church is started, the role of leadership becomes critically important. The old saying that power corrupts is more than just an old saying. It is a proverb that we in the House Church Movement *must* guard against. It is far too easy for an individual without accountability constraints to abuse their position, authority, and access to resources. Therefore, every House Church needs to put into place what we call the House Church Leadership Triad.

The House Church Leadership Triad is the backbone of the House Church Network. The Triad is made up of the House Church Pastor, their apprentice, and a Financial Secretary. Because nearly all the direct evangelism, care, and spiritual development and nurture takes place at the local level, the Leadership Triad is charged with insuring the values, mission, and vision are foremost in the House Church planning. The Leadership Triad is also responsible for insuring fiscal accountability within the House Church.

The history of the worldwide House Church Movement and its fiscal responsibility has been questionable in the past. The financial procedures demanded by the House Church Network could seem, to some, to be cumbersome. However, these procedures were tried and tested and tweaked for over a year before coming to press. The in-house procedures should take less than five minutes

#### **Leadership Triad**

##### **House Church Pastor**

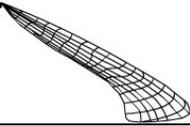
Insures the Mission, Vision, and Values are accomplished in the House Church. Charged with Pastoral Care of the flock.

##### **Apprentice**

Assists the pastor and host. Helps lead worship and care for the flock.

##### **Financial Secretary**

Oversees fiscal responsibility, provides record-keeping, helps assure the Mission, Vision, and Values are accomplished.



in most House Churches, not counting making the weekly deposit. This five minutes is a small price to pay to insure fiscal integrity of the whole House Church Network. The next section details the use of the *Comvelope*.

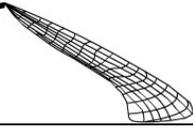
The Leadership Triad is also responsible for insuring the designated missions funds available for the House Church at the Network level are dispersed appropriately. For instance, if a personal financial need is made known during a House Church meeting, the Leadership Triad are ultimately responsible for responding to the need. This accomplishes two things. First, it takes the burden off of any individual, especially the House Church Pastor, from having to take personal responsibility for meeting a need with House Church funds. On occasion people have come to a House Church in hopes of duping the participants for funding, either short or long term. By putting fiscal decisions into the hands of the Leadership Triad, the House Church Pastor is able, for one, to put off a request until they<sup>20</sup> can talk to the others in the Triad, thus relieving them of the guilt or angst of making a decision. It also allows for the consultation of three minds rather than one. In those cases, when funds from the Designated Network Mission Funds are needed, a note on the *Comvelope* will bring a check for the next gathering. If funds are genuinely needed sooner, typically the Network Administrator can be contacted and a check issued more immediately.

### **The *Comvelope***

One of the keys to the organization of the House Church Network is the *Comvelope*. The *Comvelope* is designed to facilitate communications between each House Church and the Network, as well as insuring financial integrity across the Networks. The *Comvelope* is a clasp-style manila envelope with a two-prong fastener

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<sup>20</sup> The plural *they* is used in this manual when the singular *s/he* would otherwise be called for. This convention is used to be equitable between the genders.



used to attach a Data-Page for each House Church.<sup>21</sup> Each week, the House Church Pastors exchange their completed *Comvelopes* at the Bible Discussion Prep Talk.

Besides the attached Data-Page, the *Comvelope* contains one triplicate deposit slip, enough *HouseNet Newsletters* for each participating family with a couple extras for guests, a supply of Information-Offering Envelopes, and a self-addressed-stamped envelope. Additionally, the *Comvelope* may also contain any other supplies that were requested the week before.

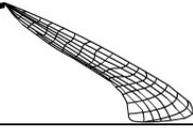
During and following the weekly worship service, the *Comvelope* is used to record attendance, public prayer needs, news and upcoming events, notes for the Network, and to request supplies that the House Church may need for the following weeks. Supplies may include the number of *HouseNet Newsletters* needed, Information-Offering Envelopes, Life Journey Bookmarks, Mentoring Matrix and Discipleship Development Skills Sheets, Bibles, and other resources the House Church Network may have available. The sidebar below lists the appropriate steps for using the *Comvelope* during and following the House Church worship service. However, The use of the *Comvelope*<sup>22</sup> is in the capable hands of the Leadership Triad. Each week a fresh *Comvelope* is picked up from the Network's Bible Discussion Prep Talk by a member of the Leadership Triad. The *Comvelope* should contain a Data-Sheet, a three-copy carbonless deposit slip, a self-addressed, stamped envelope, a quantity of Offering-Information Envelopes,<sup>23</sup> *HouseNet Newsletters*, and any other materials or notices from the Network Leadership Group. During the worship gathering, the Offering-Information Envelopes should be made available for each participant. These envelopes should be collected at the end of the service and the Financial Secretary and at least one other House Church Participant should open each envelope and record the amount given on the upper right corner of the Offering-Information Envelope. Next the offerings should

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<sup>21</sup> One *Comvelope* is included with each House Church Manual, and is pictured in the appendix for your convenience.

<sup>22</sup> See Appendix A

<sup>23</sup> See Appendix B

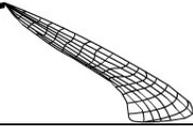


be counted and the checks, cash, and change entered on the three-part deposit slip provided in the *Comvelope*. Then the empty Offering-Information Envelopes are placed into the *Comvelope*, along with the last copy of the deposit slip. The amount of the deposit should then be entered on the *Comvelope's* Data Sheet and the Financial Secretary and the additional House Church participant should initial the *Comvelope* and

### **Comvelope Checklist**

1. Distribute Offering Envelopes, H2H News, etc.
2. Record attendance
3. Record new participant's contact information
4. Update any changes to contact information
5. Record any news, upcoming events, etc.
6. Record any notes for the Network's attention
7. Order needed materials
8. ***DON'T FORGET THE BACK OF THE Data-Sheet!***
9. Complete the 5 Purposes on the back of the Data-Sheet
10. At the END of the worship service the Financial Secretary counts the offerings with a second counter
11. Record cash donations on each Information-Offering Envelope (right hand, top corner)
12. Complete the deposit slips—make sure to list each check by the account's NAME
13. Record offering amount on the front of the *Comvelope*
14. Both counters initial the *Comvelope*
15. Place 1 copy of deposit slip and all offering envelopes into *Comvelope*
16. 2nd counter takes money, 2 deposit slips, SASE to bank
17. 2nd counter makes deposit, asks for 2nd deposit slip to be validated
18. Place deposit slip and deposit receipt into SASE and mail
19. The *Comvelope* is returned by the House Church Pastor to the Network at the next Bible Discussion Prep Talk

then return the *Comvelope* to the House Church Pastor. Finally, the offerings and the remaining deposit slips are put into the provided self-addressed, stamped envelope and



the Financial Secretary should take these funds to the Network bank within twenty-four hours. Once the deposit has been made, the second copy of the deposit slip should be validated by the bank and placed and sealed into the self-addressed, stamped envelope which should be mailed promptly. The House Church Pastor takes the Comvelope and the Data Sheet to the weekly Network Bible Discussion Prep Talk and exchanges it for a fresh one.

## House Church Record Keeping

Paperwork, paperwork, paperwork! There always seems to be some and few seem to relish the prospect of dealing with it. And yet, without good records, ministry opportunities slip away. Good records helps the House Church Pastor remember birthdays, anniversaries, and other important dates in people's lives. There's something about a greeting card, either paper or electronic, that helps people feel cared for.

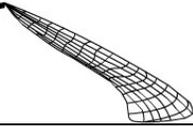
And then there are those little things like when that new guy Rudolf volunteered to be charge of bringing the communion bread, but you forgot to let him know the theme of the evening was a Luau and you were hoping that he would bring some sort of appropriate bread (like maybe, Hawaiian bread!). If you don't have good records, you may not have his phone number or email address to let him know.

And every so often, there will be that person who really wants to become a House Church Pastor too, but they want to make sure they get all the training they can get. If you've kept good records, you'll be able to help them plan what they need to do next because you know what courses and continuing education or seminars they've attended.

When completed in its entirety, the House Church Record's form<sup>24</sup> contains nearly all the information necessary to support the work of the House Church. These forms are designed to fit into any 8 ½ X 11 three-ring binder. One form should be kept for each participant, including children. Because these forms may contain confidential

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<sup>24</sup> See Appendix C



information, they should be kept in a location that is not generally available to visitors in the home.

Most of the questions are self-explanatory: name, address, etc. Any question you don't have an answer for, simply skip and ask the participant for the answer later. The rest of the questions are described in more detail, including how to gather more information.

**Status:** There are six progressive choices of commitment for the status of someone in a House Church.

Visitor: One who visits now and again.

Participant: One who regularly participates in the worship service, and/or activities of the House Church.

Committed: One who has made a profession of faith in Jesus, has been baptized, and is committed to the support of the House Church.

Apprentice: One who has made a commitment to be trained On-the-job as a House Church Pastor.

House Church Pastor: A House Church Planter. One who has planted and leads a House Church.

House Church Network Leader: A House Church Planter who has been called as the leader of a House Church Network.

**Personality Type and Leadership Style:** These are discovered by participants when they take the Personal Ministry Assessment.<sup>25</sup> The Personality Type is one of the sixteen personalities as defined by the Keirsey-Bates Inventory and/or the Myers-Briggs Personality Inventory. The Leadership Style is one of the five styles as defined by the Servant-Leadership Role Inventory.

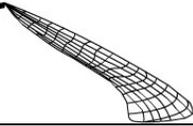
**Spiritual Gifts:** Although there are many Spiritual Gifts Inventories available, the House Church Record's form is keyed to the Personal Ministry Assessment.<sup>26</sup> It identifies twenty of the key gifts for ministry in the church today.

**Personal Passions:** As identified through observation and/or through the Personal Ministry Assessment.

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<sup>25</sup> Available from The House Church Network.

<sup>26</sup> See Chapter 5



**Journey Group:**<sup>27</sup> Approximate date when the participant committed to this accountability group.

**Profession of Faith:** The date when a participant committed their life, will, and behaviors to Jesus and His teachings.

**Baptized:** Date when the believer became baptized and by whom they were baptized.

**Spiritual Counseling Completed:** Date *Restoring the Foundations* or *Bondage Breakers* was completed by the believer. These Spiritual Counseling Experiences are available from specially trained and supervised members of the House Church Network.

**M<sup>2</sup>:** Date Mentoring Maturity was begun and who is the responsible mentor. M<sup>2</sup> is a discipleship skills mentoring program available to all who want to intentionally mature and progress in discipleship. Required of all House Church Pastors and their apprentices.

**Apprentice:** Date apprenticeship began to become a House Church Pastor.

**ILS:**<sup>28</sup> Date entered and graduated the Interactive Learning System. The ILS is a seminary substitute for those who want to become the best-equipped House Church Pastors possible. Courses are listed on the House Church Record's forms, and should be checked off as each is completed.

**Continuing Education Coursework, Seminars, & Workshops:** Many in the House Church Movement desire to become more aware and better equipped as leaders and as disciples. As time passes, however, it is sometimes difficult to remember what courses they took and when they were taken. The House Church Pastor can track these extra events on the Record form so as to assist the participant should they ever need to recall those events for resumés, denominational licensing or ordination, credit for college, and so on.

**Notes:** Any other information that the House Church Pastor deems helpful to remember. Notes could include other events such as family births or deaths, ongoing illness or disabilities, aspirations or goals, and so on.

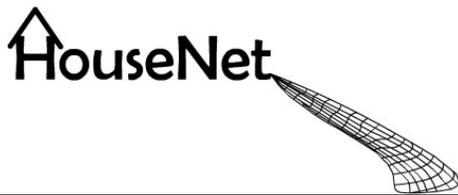
## Reproducing the House Church Network

Once a House Church begins, it is inevitable that it will grow and reproduce if it practices the Five Purposes. When a House Church reproduces itself, that is, when it

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<sup>27</sup> See Chapter 5

<sup>28</sup> See Chapter 5



# House Church Manual

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starts a second House Church, the decision must be made whether or not to form a House Church Network. There are a number of advantages to forming or joining a local Network.

First, there is an issue of accountability. In our litigious culture, accountability and responsibility has become a lost art. Few are willing to take responsibility for much of anything. People sue McDonalds for spilling coffee in their laps. Someone walks into

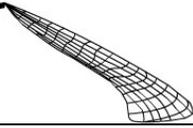
**Christians seem to want the freedom to live and act in any manner they choose without concern about the reputation they're making in the name of Jesus.**

a sliding glass door and the homeowner is responsible because the glass was too clean or because it didn't have warning stickers on it. And Christians seem to want the freedom to live and act in any manner they choose without concern about

the reputation they're making in the name of Jesus. The same goes for churches. In one independent House Church, the House Church Pastor became oppressive in his biblical interpretation and subjected his family, his church members, and their families to his particular interpretations. Because the House Church was totally independent, there was no one with any authority to correct this wayward brother and, to this day, he continues to spiritually abuse his flock. In a House Church Network, the other House Church Pastors hold each other accountable to proper biblical interpretation as well as to the Five Purposes and the DNA of the Network.

Second, a House Church Network can cooperate in a number of mission ventures that an individual House Church could not. For instance, although a single House Church could certainly volunteer at a Habitat for Humanity project, a House Church Network could conceivably both finance and build a Habitat for Humanity home. Or an individual House Church could help out at a local community food bank, but a Network could begin and operate a Christian-based food bank that could offer both bread and the Bread of Life.

Other reasons for being a part of a House Church Network include participating in regular Network Celebration Worship services; offering financial and emotional support



across the Network; and for those who are a members of the House Church Network, there are many resources and services to support the work and the mission of each House Church.

Much of the remainder of this manual introduces the nuts and bolts of not only how to do House Church, but how to build a Network of House Churches.<sup>29</sup> By building Networks we can be sure we are establishing faithful, accountable churches that will accomplish the mission of connecting people with God and helping them to become committed disciples of Jesus Christ.

## House Church Network Responsibilities

The first thing the Network is responsible for is the well-being of its fellow House Church Pastors. Each week the Network pastors should meet together for prayer, sharing, accountability, and study. The exact format of this meeting is open, but as a

**The first thing the Network is responsible for is the well-being of its fellow House Church Pastors.**

guideline, the pastors may want to meet similarly to one of their House Churches with a time of fellowship over a meal, a time of worship, a time for sharing concerns, needs, and praises, a prayer time, a Bible discussion time, and a time for housekeeping issues. Additionally, once a Network has been established, the Network pastors should consider participation in the Mentoring to Maturity (M<sup>2</sup>) program and the Interactive Learning System (ILS) offered by the House Church Network. The M<sup>2</sup> program provides ongoing one-on-one coaching and mentoring to the House Church Pastor in the spiritual disciplines, personal discipleship, and House Church skills. The ILS provides a near seminary level training experience for all pastors, regardless of their background or former training (see the section on Discipleship Development for more information).

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<sup>29</sup> There isn't much new here, the apostle Paul essentially established a fellowship of House Church Networks across Asia Minor. For instance, when Paul wrote to the churches in Galatia he was essentially addressing a Network of House Churches in Antioch, Lystra, Derbe, Iconium, and Apollonia.

The second responsibility of the Network is for the health of the local House Churches. Each week the Network pastors share the state of their House Churches and how they are accomplishing the Five Purposes. When a House Church Pastor is having difficulty leading his/her church in the accomplishment of the Five Purposes, or if other difficulties arise, the other Network pastors should offer support, guidance, and encouragement from their own experience and training.

Additionally, the Network pastors should plan and produce regular Network Worship Celebrations for all the House Churches to participate in. These Worship Celebrations encourage fellowship with other Christians beyond the individual House Church. The Worship Celebrations should also be used as an evangelistic tool to invite the public to. A meeting space should be secured (many church buildings are available for use by sister churches in the afternoon or evenings for little or no cost) and the event communicated between the House Churches. The Network may also choose to advertise the event on campuses, in the newspaper, on fliers, and so on.

The Celebrations should include all the regular elements of the House Church, except on a grander scale. The music may be led by a group of musicians, a joint choir, or a band. The Bible study may be led by a skilled public speaker. The fellowship meal could be catered by the Network, by an individual House Church, or it could be a grand pot luck. The Network should consider doing a ministry service project before, during, or after the Celebration. Ministries like food or clothing distributions to the needy and many servant evangelism projects have a natural affinity to Network-wide events.

The third responsibility of the House Church Network is financial. Each House Church Network is responsible for the pool of House Church funds, the distribution of those funds, as well as tracking donor contributions in keeping with the IRS rules.

The key to the financial organization of the Network is the *Comvelope*.<sup>30</sup> The *Comvelope* is designed to facilitate communications between each House Church and its corresponding House Church Network, as well as insuring financial integrity across the

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<sup>30</sup> See appendix B.

Association. The *Comvelope* is a clasp-style manila envelope with a two-prong fastener used to attach a Data-Page<sup>31</sup> for each House Church. Each week, the House Church Pastors exchange their *Comvelope* at the Bible Discussion Prep Talk. The fresh *Comvelope* has an attached Data-Page and contains one triplicate deposit slip, *HouseNet Newsletters* for each participant and extras for guests, a self-addressed, stamped envelope, Journey Group Bookmarks as requested, and any other notices for the House Churches. At the weekly worship the *Comvelope* is used to record attendance, prayer needs, any news relevant to the House Church Network, supply needs including needed *HouseNet Newsletters*, Journey Group Bookmarks, and any notes pertinent to the House Church Network team.

The *Comvelope* is collected weekly by the House Church Network Leadership and delivered to the House Church Network Administrator. These details should be tracked using a data/accounting program such as Parson Technology's *MoneyCounts*, Intuit's *Quicken*, or *Quickbooks Pro*. The information tracked should include the weekly attendees of each House Church, the tithe/offerings made by each contributor, and the total deposits made by each House Church. The deposit slips are then filed according to each House Church.<sup>32</sup> Donor receipt statements should be generated and delivered on a quarterly basis to all contributors to comply with IRS requirements.

When the mailed deposit receipt and slip is received by the Network, it should be delivered to the Administrator. The Administrator's responsibility is to insure the deposit receipt matches the deposit slip and then records it with an accounting software package tracking each House Church deposit by their eight alpha-numeric designation.<sup>33</sup>

The Network should develop a working budget for the use of their funds. These funds may be used to fund a part-time Administrator. Remaining funds should be used

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<sup>31</sup> The Data-Page is updated weekly at the House Church Network level with a current membership roster.

<sup>32</sup> Deposit slips are to be archived each year and retained for seven years, then shredded and discarded.

<sup>33</sup> The Alpha-Numeric code is assigned by using the first three letters of the House Church town, two digit month and year of the founding of the House Church, and an alpha character designating the first, second, third, etc. House Church begun in the designated town. Thus the first House Church started in Seattle in November 2002 would be SEA1102A.

for local missions, regular Network-wide celebrations, servant evangelism events, and local marketing as determined by the Network Leadership Team in consultation with the House Church Leadership Triads.

The fourth responsibility of the Network is to keep the channels of communications open between the House Churches. Every member of every House Church should be aware of what is going on in each of the other Networked House Churches. Information such as upcoming events, missions projects, and prayer needs should be freely shared within the Network so that support and encouragement can be offered.

The first line of communication has already been mentioned: the *Comvelope*. The *Comvelope* has been designed to expedite ongoing contact between the Network and each individual House Church. Communication flows in both directions, from the Network Leadership Team to the individual churches and from each church to the Network.

The second method of insuring effective communications is *HouseNet Online*. In an age where computer mail is often more widely used and read than snail-mail, the *HouseNet Online* E-zine is the most time-effective way to message the Network Churches. The *HouseNet Online* can be sent as often as “breaking news” and events warrant, but should be sent at least weekly to all subscribers. Initially, the E-zine should include news, reminders, and upcoming events, but as the Network grows could include articles, reader contributions, tips, pictures, and both music and video as technology improves. Production of *HouseNet Online* should initially be the responsibility of the Administrator; however, a volunteer editor should be recruited from within the Network as soon as possible.

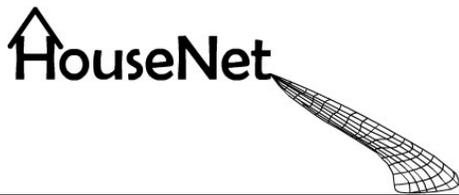
A third method of communications is the *HouseNet Newsletter*. Understanding that there are still many who do not have Internet access, the *HouseNet Newsletter* bridges the communication’s gap between those who are not wired and the wider Network. The *HouseNet Newsletter* should be more than a hardcopy print of the related E-zine, but instead should be a monthly publication worthy of standing on its own. In the

early stages it too should begin by including news and upcoming events, but should initially include at least article reprints, profiles, and perhaps even a column and an editorial section. As time passes, this publication could sell some limited advertising to underwrite its budget; however, marketing should probably be limited to those who are in some way connected with the local Network.

A final communication's means is the Network HomePage. As of this writing, the domain [www.hcna.us](http://www.hcna.us) has been purchased for use as a means for communicating across the House Church Network. Each Network has the opportunity to produce and maintain its own web presence using the [hcna.us](http://hcna.us) address, thus the Auburn House Church Network web address could be [www.hcna.us/auburn/](http://www.hcna.us/auburn/) or similarly addressed. The Network maintains the primary website for the Association and would naturally provide a link to each of the House Church Networks' websites.

A Network website should include a variety of other communications tools for those within the Network, as well as for those beyond. The website should include a master directory of local House Churches, there should be a variety of online forums for those wishing to discuss various aspects of the House Church Movement, and a collection of tools, articles, and resources for those interested in exploring the House Church Movement should also be available. Since this site will get hits from the unchurched, it is expected that the Network website may want to insure their site is interactive in scope, providing video and audio resources for the savvy web browser. By so doing, it is expected that some evangelism and discipleship may take place through the efforts of those developing and maintaining these pages.

Finally, the House Church Network is responsible for the reproduction of the Network itself. Each House Church Network begins to outgrow its structure at approximately ten House Churches. Larger Networks become unwieldy, ministry to the House Church Pastors suffers, and reproduction of House Churches can become curtailed. To alleviate this problem, it is expected that each Network will give birth to new Networks periodically.



# House Church Manual

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Networks should divide along either geographic or affinity lines, although a combination of the two is ideal. For instance, a group of House Churches in a suburb may become a single House Church Network. When this Network is ready to divide, the new Networks may form along

**As House Church Networks reproduce, the very fabric of the predominant society begins to change**

community lines. As these new Networks become ready to divide, they may organize according to neighborhood or subdivisions.

As House Church Networks reproduce, the fabric of the predominant society begins to change. Since House Churches are structured for rapid reproduction, the House Church Networks must be able to respond quickly as well. By limiting the size of the Networks and encouraging their reproduction, the Christian faith, so long sidelined by our culture, may regain its status and stature and make a *significant* difference in America and beyond.

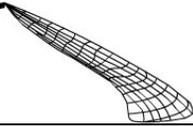
## **House Church Network Leadership**

The House Church Network Leadership Team is an important element to the success of the Network. The team comprises all the Network House Church Pastors and a Network Administrator. The Network Administrator is a volunteer or a part-time employee of the Network who is responsible for a number of Network tasks. In addition, one of the House Church Pastors should be appointed to serve as the Network's Lead Pastor.

### **The Lead Pastor**

The Network Lead Pastor is responsible for insuring the Network accomplishes the Mission, Vision, and Values of the Network. They convene the weekly Bible Discussion Prep Talks and is responsible for facilitating these meetings. When possible, they may attend denominational meetings as the representative clergy for the Network.

The Lead Pastor should be a man or woman of good repute. They should have served as a House Church Pastor for a significant period of time, although in a new Network this is often unfeasible. The Lead Pastor should be committed to the tenets of this manual and should be a participant in a Journey Group.



Whenever possible, the Lead Pastor should be a licensed or ordained minister in the sponsoring denomination. Additionally, the Lead Pastor should either be a participant or a graduate of the Interactive Learning System.

## **The Network Administrator**

The Network Administrator's responsibilities nearly eclipse those of the rest of the leadership. They have the ultimate fiscal accountability assurance responsibility, as well as insuring the day-to-day supply needs of the Network is met.

The Administrator serves first and foremost as the bookkeeper of the Network. Each week they insure the received validated bank deposit slips match the deposit slips returned with the *Comvelopes*. Additionally, they track both collective and individual's giving in each House Church and record this information with an appropriate software package. Using this information, they generate giving reports for all donors quarterly.

Networks that participate in a larger fellowship of Networks, such as the House Church Network Association, receive a monthly check from the Association based on House Church giving. The Administrator is responsible for insuring the monthly funds are deposited.

Although there are few bills the Network should be liable for, the Administrator is responsible for insuring these are paid in a timely manner. Therefore, the Administrator should be the primary signer on the Network's checking account.

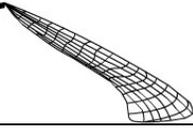
Additional responsibilities of the Administrator include insuring that fresh *Comvelopes* are available for House Church in the Network, as well insuring ordered materials, needed House Church mission's monies, etc. are delivered to the weekly Bible Discussion Prep Talk for distribution.

The Network Administrator should be a person of good repute, fully trustworthy in matters of finances. They should be active within the House Church and be a supporter of the movement. The Administrator should be familiar with the appropriate financial software package used by the Network. Administrators should be detail-oriented people who enjoy working with numbers. They should also be timely in accomplishing their tasks.

The many responsibilities of the Network may require a number of other volunteers to accomplish them all. For instance, someone who specializes in Web development may be asked to keep the website up-to-date. Another tech-savvy volunteer may want to take the responsibility of generating the weekly *NetNews Online*. And still another may enjoy production of the *HouseNet Newsletter*. The more people who share

the responsibilities of the Network, the less likely it is that needed mission's funding will be spent in salaries.

However, it is important to note that as a Network grows, it may be appropriate to fund the Administrator's job because of its scope. Most tasks in the House Church Network are accomplished by dedicated people who serve the Lord for the joy of serving. However, the weighty responsibilities of the Administrator may take significant time well beyond the call of duty. In these cases, the Network may decide to compensate the Administrator with a part-time, hourly wage. In most Networks the Administrator's tasks can be accomplished in less than ten hours per week.



## Chapter 2

### Worship

The worship service is the centerpiece of the House church movement. Worship may take place at any time during the week. It may occur in the morning or in the evening; on Sundays, Saturdays, Thursdays, or whatever day and time suits the House Church. The leader of the House Church will generally host worship in their home, but another site may be chosen. Wherever the House Church meets, it is expected that they shall use a home or a site appropriate to the local culture and that it is either no-cost or very low-cost.

Worship in homes generally looks different than in the Institutional Church, but it has many of the same elements. It should be, first and foremost, more relaxed and informal than most Institutional Churches. In the House Church, every worship service includes praise, prayer, Scripture, sharing, and communion. On the other hand, no weekly worship service between one House Church and another is likely look the same, since each House Church will take on its own nuances and flavor.

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

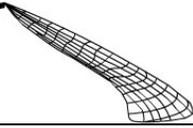
These weekly events are loosely based on the early church's practices as they are recorded in Acts 2:42-47. It is expected that most House Churches will meet over a meal, most likely a potluck (covered dish) supper. Besides praise, prayer, Scripture, sharing, and communion, other worship elements may be adopted or adapted, including:

- Accompanied or unaccompanied singing
- Candle lighting
- Story telling
- Blessings
- Healings
- Prophecies
- Words of knowledge
- Intercessory prayer
- Confessions
- Periods of silent meditation
- Scripture readings
- Original poetry and/or song
- Foot washings
- Responsive readings
- Evangelism
- Planning
- Sharing of needs
- Service to others
- Prayer-walks
- Missions
- Or other worship elements indigenous to the local culture

## **Praise**

Praising God is one of the most important and fulfilling worship elements. A time of authentic and exuberant praise will set the tone for the rest of the worship time. It relaxes people, boosts the endorphin levels, and connects us with God. Praise is most often expressed in song, although this is not the only way to demonstrate praise. However, when it comes to music, it may be as simple as singing a cappella, singing along with a CD or a DVD, or singing while accompanied by a guitar, a piano, or ????. Members of the House Church

**The key to authentic expressions of praise is remembering that praising God is an offering, a gift, from you to God.**



Network can legally make copies of most religious music for use as song sheets in their home worship services.<sup>34</sup> Other ways to express praise include the reading or reciting of psalms and poetry, both published and original pieces. Dancing has also been a long-time form of praise, as is clapping and other non-verbal expressions.

The key to authentic expressions of praise is remembering that praising God is an offering, a gift, from you to God. There is no audience, though there may well be multiple worshippers. You are playing to audience of one—when it comes to praising God it’s between you and the Lord.

## Prayer

One of the House Church Network’s most important values in prayer. Prayer bathes everything we do in the House Church. Indeed, it is meant to be a part of everything a disciple of Jesus does, so it’s important to allow sufficient time for praying. Many House Churches fall into the habit of Parentheses Prayer—that is, they open with a word of prayer and close with a word of prayer. Now, there’s nothing wrong with an opening and closing prayer, but if a brief hello and goodbye is the only time we take with God during a worship service, we’re missing the opportunity for the most fulfilling time of the service.

In the early days of a House Church, prayer requests are often of the “God bless Aunt Bessie” nature. However, as the participants get to know and trust each other, they will become more transparent in their prayers and their prayer requests. In most established House Churches it is not uncommon for someone to ask for prayer for personal and spiritual issues that they are battling with. Others may ask the group to lay hands on them in prayer for healing or for another need.<sup>35</sup> The prayer time can become so important to the group that other activities are regularly curtailed in order to spend additional time in prayer. Because of the intimate nature of the House Church, be

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<sup>34</sup> The House Church Network holds a CCLI license that covers each of its House Churches. A list of music publishers covered by this license can be found at [www.ccli.com](http://www.ccli.com).

<sup>35</sup> See James 5:14-16