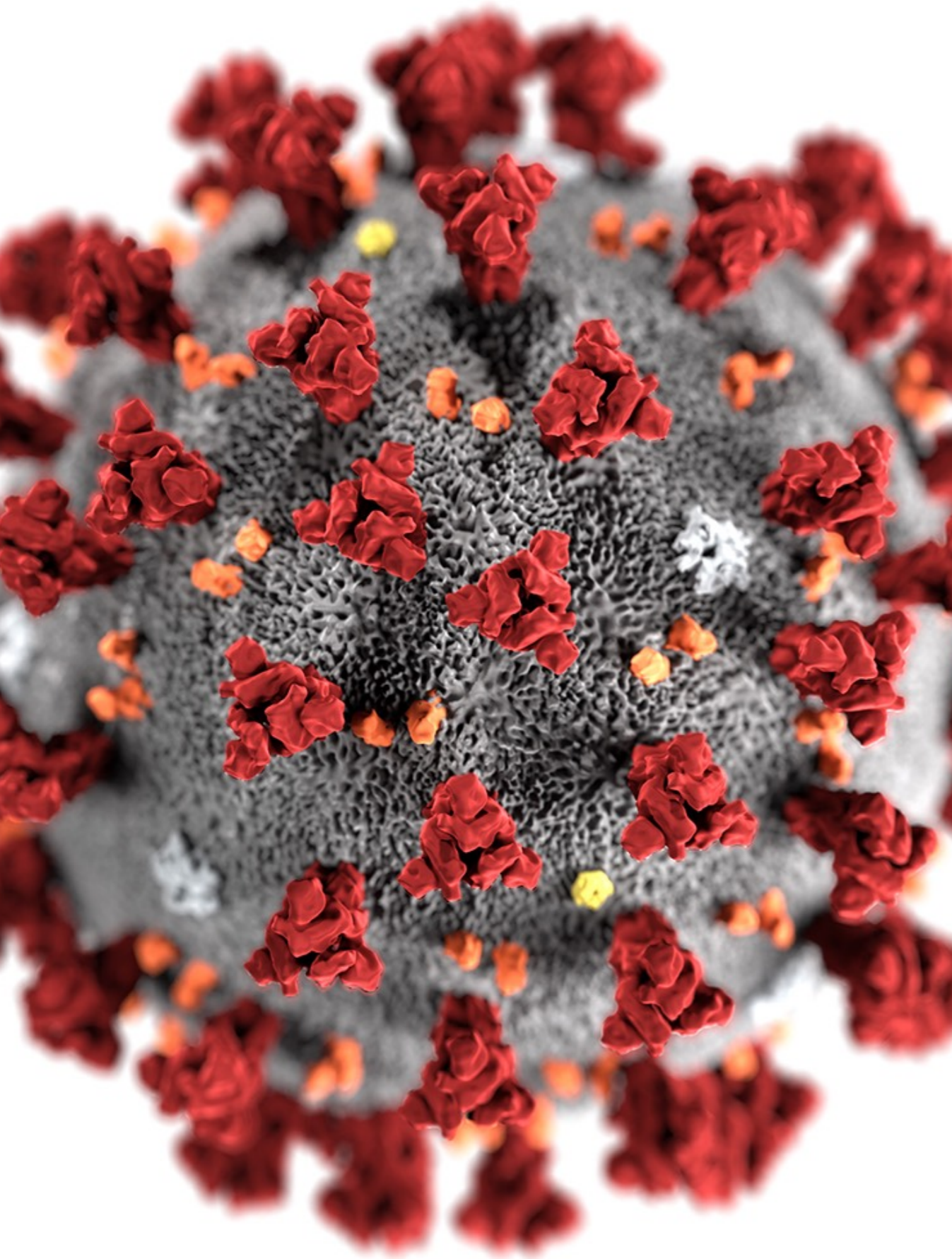


CHURCH
CHURCH
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CHURCH
the
CHURCH
HOUSE
and the
HOUSE
CHURCH

A Guide Intended for Inland Lighthouse Church of Riverside





Introduction

The first quarter of the year 2020 did not go according to plan. Well, any human plan. Most of us couldn't have imagined how quickly the U.S. government shut down business and religious gatherings in one fell swoop, but nothing takes God by surprise and COVID-19 isn't the exception. In Abraham Lincoln's second inaugural address he said of the tragedy of the American Civil War, "The Almighty has his own purposes."

Of course, we can eternally speculate about the potential purposes of a viral outbreak and the viral fear that followed. We can draw conclusions about the impact to the state of affairs in the political, medical, and business sectors, but it is imperative we realize how this impacts the church most of all.

It was a wake-up call for America to the reality that the comforts of our society are fragile at best, that time is short in the overall view of eternity, and that faith and fear can be weaponized. Outside of praying for a spiritual awakening in America and repenting on behalf of the nation, how our country handles the wake up call is outside of my direct sphere of influence.

However, early 2020 was also a wake up call to the church and she is within my sphere of influence.

Diversified Investments

The modern, global Apostolic church is clear on its doctrine and can stand solidly upon scripture to defend the Biblical doctrine of:

1. The Oneness of the Godhead
2. The Dual Nature of Christ (Divine & Human)
3. The Necessity of Salvation per Acts 2:38
4. A Lifestyle of Holiness & Separation

Although our doctrine is unquestionably Apostolic, our methods may be lacking. Had our methods been more Apostolic before COVID-19, the impact would have been felt much less and the noise much quieter.

Financially, we know it is wise advice to diversify our investments to mitigate too much risk in one particular area, yet churches can be observed to have nearly all of our eggs in one basket. What basket? A building.

How does a church diversify her investments? By creating an atmosphere that encourages home or small groups to thrive.



In the modern, Apostolic church, we see an imbalance leaning towards the construction or acquisition, maintenance, improvement, and programming of a physical building. This is not nearly observed at the same scale in the New Testament book of Acts.

What we are not saying is that buildings are bad. What we are saying is that buildings are not all of the plan. Some would argue that even though the doctrine should never change, the methods should adapt to the cultural context of the present locale and generation. Though this may be true to some degree, we can also see that some methods never change.

Preaching, as a method of transmitting spiritual understanding and revelation, motivating transformation, calling for repentance, increasing faith, and communicating the plan of salvation, for instance, isn't subject to change as a method. That is the means whereby God has chosen to save them that believe (1 Corinthians 1:21) and it won't be changing in God's plan until Heaven. Yet, that isn't the only Apostolic method that should remain unchanged.



The Church: Building or People?

In order to set up another method for discussion, consider for a moment the risk that a building-centric mentality poses for the body of believers in a city called the church. As we've just been reminded in 2020, we need to ask ourselves, "What happens when the church buildings become unavailable?" Is the church prepared to continue or is it put on a hiatus until further notice?

This challenges our millennia-old paradigm of traditional church buildings. How do you have a church without a building?

The early Apostolic church may very well be thinking, "How do you only have church in one building?" The first church building didn't appear until long after the first apostles were all dead.

The Apostolic Model

According to the Book of Acts

Let's look at the growth of the early Jerusalem church:



In Acts 2, 3,000 believers are added



In Acts 4:4, about 5,000 men plus women & children are added



In Acts 5:14, multitudes were added as they lose count of 18,120+ believers



In Acts 8, a whole city believes. Apostles preach in many Samaritan villages on the way back to Jerusalem



In Acts 21:20, the word "myrias" or 'innumerable thousands' is used



Where to House Them?

These vast thousands of believers had to gather often to be disciplined and so where would you put this “mega” church? Not only is this the case in Jerusalem, but you also have the multi-city aspect of the church as well. The early church had two answers for this dilemma:

(Acts 2, New English Translation)

42 They were devoting themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer....

45 and they began selling their property and possessions and distributing the proceeds to everyone, as anyone had need.

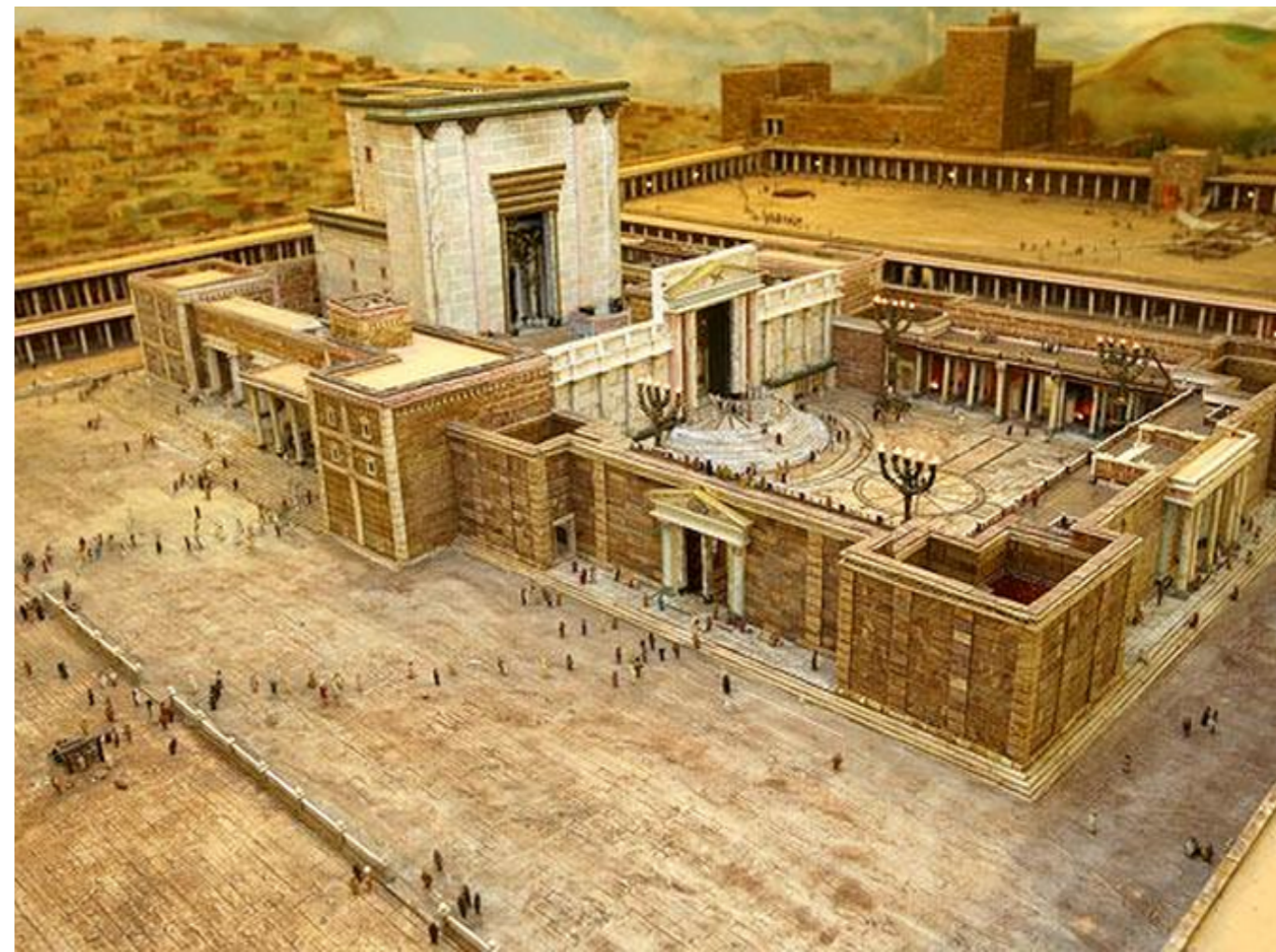
46 Every day they continued to gather together by common consent

in the temple courts,

breaking bread from house to house,

sharing their food with glad and humble hearts,
47 praising God and having the good will of all the people. And the Lord was adding to their number every day those who were being saved.

See also Acts 5:42



Apparently, this method of public gatherings in the temple or at a synagogue and private gatherings in homes was common practice throughout the early New Testament church. Paul would tell the elders of the church at Ephesus in Acts 20:20,

“You know that I did not hold back from proclaiming to you anything that would be helpful, and from teaching you publicly and from house to house,”

Where did the Apostle Paul, who was a Jewish convert and late comer to this truth, pick up on this model? He had clearly seen somewhere how successful it was and had adopted this methodology in the churches he started all over Asia Minor. Acts 8:3 tells us that before Paul was the great apostle, he was first called Saul and he persecuted the church. But as he began to wreak havoc in the church dragging men and women to prison and eventually their deaths, he learned early on that it wasn't effective to show up to the temple courts, even though he had the full backing of the Jewish religious leaders of his day.



The early church quickly outgrew the temple courts and met for prayer and preaching from house to house

In history, it is often the antagonists that shed the most light on the specific circumstances of the heroes. We have the luxury of seeing the Apostolic model from both sides. From Saul's perspective, he understood that to really inflict damage on the church, his only chance at stopping it was that he would have to go where the Christians were most often: house to house.

No doubt Paul's early dealings with Christians as he hunted and persecuted them gave him great insights that would later be beneficial after he quit fighting the church and decided to, not only join them, but become a missionary starting churches all over the known world. When he began to do so, he did it according to the Apostolic Model he had seen in Jerusalem and beyond.

The Apostolic Model

Beyond the Book of Acts

Use of the house-to-house model extends further in the New Testament church proven by Paul's greetings:



In Romans 16:3-5 Paul greets Priscilla & Aquila and the church in their house



Later Paul was with their house church (1 Corinthians 16:19) & greets Corinth



Philemon had a church in his house (1:2) at Colosse



In Colossians 4:15 Paul greets Nymphas' house church in Laodicea



The Apostolic Model

Foreshadowed in the Old Testament

The concept of religious gatherings in the home did not originate with the apostles. It transcends the NT...

Before there was a tabernacle or even a temple, the Jews celebrated passover at home. When God through Moses instituted it in Egypt, the Israelites are commanded in Exodus 12:4 to share it with their next door neighbors if one house is too small to consume the entire passover lamb.

Exodus 12:4 If any household is too small for a lamb, the man and his next-door neighbor are to take a lamb according to the number of people - you will make your count for the lamb according to how much each one can eat.

The fulfillment of the Old Testament passover lamb is the one and only perfect Lamb of God, Jesus Christ. Christians, may we suggest that your home is too small to keep the Lamb to yourself. We are commanded to share it with our friends, family, and neighbors.





The Apostolic Model In Summary



There is unquestionably a need for corporate gathering for worship, supernatural demonstration, preaching, coordination of giving efforts, fellowship, greater perspective of the enormity of the Church body at large, etc..

Could it be that Hebrews 10:25 applies to more than just a public church service? If so, how are we, as an Apostolic movement, faring in our quest for Biblical church?

Hebrews 10:24-25 (NET)
And let us take thought of how to spur one another on to love and good works, 25 **not abandoning our own meetings,** as some are in the habit of doing, but encouraging each other, and even more so because you see the day drawing near.

Church attendance must be more than public gatherings, but, as we find throughout scripture, it should be balanced with house meetings for the purpose of fellowship, discipleship, and even pastoral care by elders/leaders.

The beauty of this balanced model really shines in moments of persecution or other situations in which a public gathering is not possible or legally permissible.

A Question of Terminology?

Home Bible studies are readily accepted in Apostolic circles and beyond as extremely effective in disciple-making efforts, but walls of resistance can be found when saying “house church” or “small groups” or “cell groups” or “life groups” which are all basically synonymous terms describing a book of Acts concept. So maybe it’s partly an issue of semantics?



Why Does House Church Work?

Beside the fact that church meetings being conducted in homes on top of public gatherings is a Biblical idea and clearly an Apostolic model we should emulate, it works from a very practical standpoint as well. In fact, a home environment is ideal for discipleship because...

1. It's a relaxed setting.

Sharing food in a home relaxes a person and gears them for learning and encourages vulnerability, questions, and practical growth. Deuteronomy 6:9 shows doctrine should be taught in the home at every opportunity.

2. Relationships come easier.

Getting to know people can be a challenge in a large venue; however, relationship building is organic, consistent with the expectations of a home, and boosts retention. Jesus model of discipleship happened often over meals at homes.

3. Pastoral care happens automatically.

Prayer for the sick and the practical meeting of needs in a group is frequently an automatic response of a group that gathers for Bible study. If you see someone weekly and find out they have a need, frankly, ignoring it would be abnormal.

The Work of Ministry

Pastors or Saints?

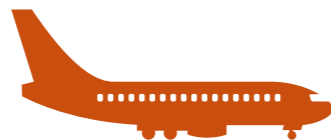
The Pastor's Responsibilities



- Administration:
 - God calls pastors to oversee a particular assembly and ensure that local portion of the body of Christ fits the model of scripture in doctrine, lifestyle, operation, etc. in two primary realms:
 - Spiritual (vision, guidance, feed/preach the Word)
 - Practical (organization/cooperation, asset management)
 - Equipping the saints for the maturity & ministry (Ephesians 4:11-13)

Ephesians 4:11-13 (NET) It was he who gave some as apostles, some as prophets, some as evangelists, and some as pastors and teachers, 12 to **equip the saints for the work of ministry**, that is, to build up the body of Christ, 13 until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God - a mature person, attaining to the measure of Christ's full stature.

The Saints' Responsibilities



- Ministration:
 - On top of their own walk with God, He calls saints to carry out the work of ministry as the body of Christ in two primary realms as well:
 - Spiritual (discipling and loving souls)
 - Practical (serving and giving to needs)

Ministry at Work

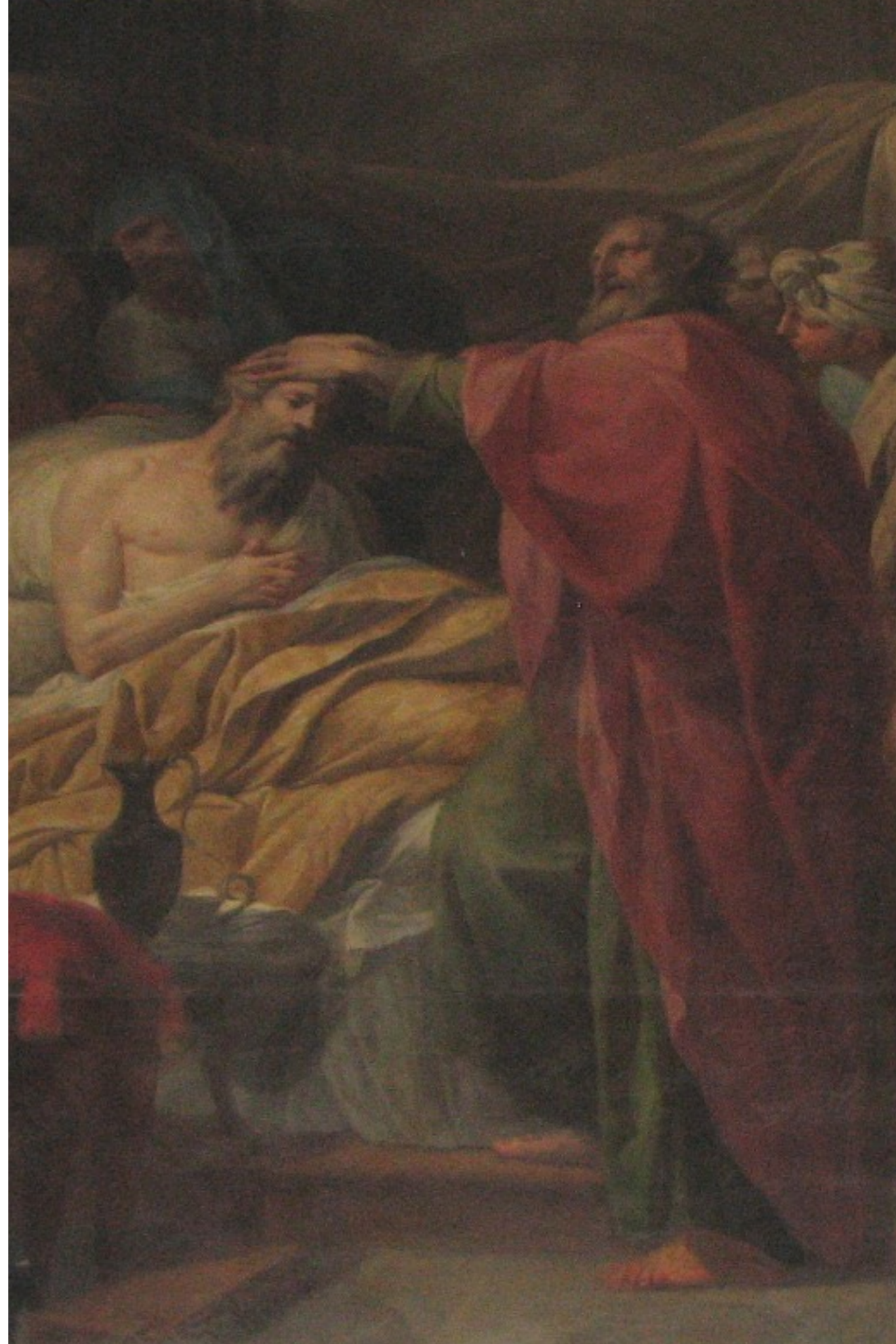
Unfortunately, we have a long-standing paradigm that ministry is a title for preachers. Ministry is more accurately the work of the saints as equipped by and under the direction of church leaders (apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers).

Saints are responsible for more than regular church attendance for consistent feeding, although that's important. Home or small groups are vital to the life of a church because it takes ministry to another level.

Isaiah 58:7 makes it clear that God expects His people to bring people into their homes help to meet needs.

One of the ways ministry happens in a home is through prayer. Prayer for the sick and miracles are often seen in homes in the New Testament church. For example, Jesus, the greatest example of this ministry, heals Peter's mother-in-law at home, Paul went in to the bedroom of Publius' father in Acts 28 and healed him, and in James 5:14 those who are sick are told "to call for the elders" so they can lay hands on them and heal them.

In Acts 12 we find the church at a prayer meeting over Peter's capture, but it wasn't held in a church-owned building, we find it being held in a home.



Can People Be Saved in a Home?

Examples abound in Acts that indicate the beautiful salvation experience of repentance, baptism in Jesus' Name, and the infilling of the Holy Ghost can happen in a 'house church' and not just in a 'church house.'

ACTS 2 The 120 First Believers

On the Day of Pentecost in Acts 2:1-4, for the very first time, Jesus' disciples are Spirit-baptized with the evidence of speaking in tongues.

ACTS 10 Cornelius & Family

After Peter preaching in Cornelius' home, his household receives the Holy Ghost and is water baptized in Jesus' Name according to the Gospel.

ACTS 16 Philippian Jailer

During a late night Bible study initiated by a divine earthquake that shook Paul & Silas' jailer, his entire family was saved at an impromptu house service.



SMALL GROUPS:

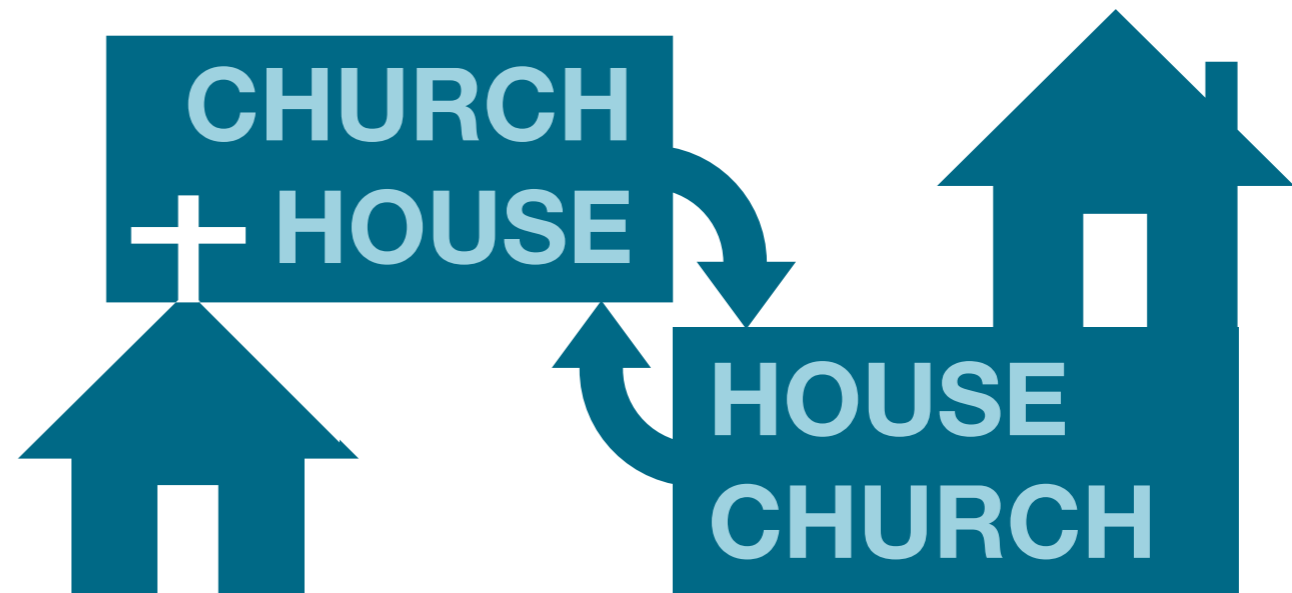
Unnecessary Competition or Essential Component of the Church?

Many churches reject the idea of small groups because they see them strictly as competition for the public gatherings or church services.

Others do little better on the continuum and see them as an optional program to keep people busy and involved. Needless to say, this is often a culture in which small groups start and then quickly fail.

Neither of those come close to what we see in scripture. Small groups, home groups, life groups, home Bible studies, or a myriad of other tags house church goes by is more than that - it is an essential component of a thriving Apostolic church.

Rather than seeing them as competition, the proper perspective is to view them as feeding into one another in a healthy balance. Visitors to the church house should be encouraged to join a small group. Meanwhile, visitors to a house church should be invited to and prepared for the church house. These two branches work in concert to bring collective and individual growth in the overall church.



As a case in point to the effectiveness of home-based work, look what happens when Jesus tells the now delivered demoniac to go back to the Gadarenes to his home and to his people to testify about Jesus to his family and friends. Jesus wasn't worried about competition with His healing and teaching services. On the contrary, when Jesus returns to the region later, the same people who were begging Him to leave, now recognize and run to Him. These are the powerful potential results of a house church in operation within the context of God's master plan.



Book of Acts Church: Beginning to End

From the very first pages of the history of the church in the book of Acts, the people of God can be found in homes praying, worshipping, experiencing the presence of God, teaching doctrine, and engaging in fellowship.

Even Pentecost happened in the famed upper room of Jesus' passover meal and last supper with the disciples, which was in a private home according to Matthew 26:18.

The church's methods remain the same up until the end of the recorded history of the Acts of the Apostles, where we find Paul hosting Bible studies or small groups in his own rented house until his death. In describing this, Luke tells us in Acts 28:30-31 that Paul received all (in hospitality) preaching and teaching Jesus Christ (discipling).

If the church's method from the beginning to the end of Acts never changed, why aren't we doing more of that right now? It's time for the church to become more Apostolic than ever before. It's time for house church.



Part II

Having HOUSE
CHURCH



Core Principles (of House Church or Small Groups)

In Part I we learned the WHY of small groups or house church, but it's worth summarizing and applying that just a bit more here before we talk about the HOW:

The Apostolic model (Acts 2:46-47) included house-to-house church.

Our Mission statement to “Magnify Jesus and Make Disciples” applies to all that we do, which includes small groups or house church as well.

In Ephesians, Paul tells us that leaders are a gift to the church to equip the saints for the work of the ministry, but he doesn't stop there. He continues to describe that work as “the building up of the body of Christ until...” (here comes the goal) “...we all attain the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God - a mature person, attaining to the measure of Christ's full stature.” (Ephesians 4:11-13)

As small group leaders, this is our mandate - to help people grow to spiritual maturity in areas of unity, faith, and knowledge. It is to teach them to feed themselves and, ultimately, to feed others also. (See 2 Timothy 2:2)

THE THREE SHIPS

Of Small Groups



FELLOWSHIP



WORSHIP



DISCIPLESHIP

As we read the description of the first church in Acts 2:42-48, we find fellowship, worship, and discipleship (teaching, doctrine) are core elements to what the church did, not just in the public gatherings, but from house to house. Small groups need to focus on these same three 'ships'. Fellowship is our relationships with others in our group and it's vitally important that we connect to one another on a personal level as this boosts retention and provides for a mutual satisfaction of a basic human need. Worship describes our relationship with God and would include things like prayer, praise, singing, etc.. Finally, discipleship is really centered on our maturity and relationship to the Word of God (knowledge, obedience). Keeping these three 'ships' afloat and navigating in the right direction is key to a successful small group.

SMALL GROUP MODEL

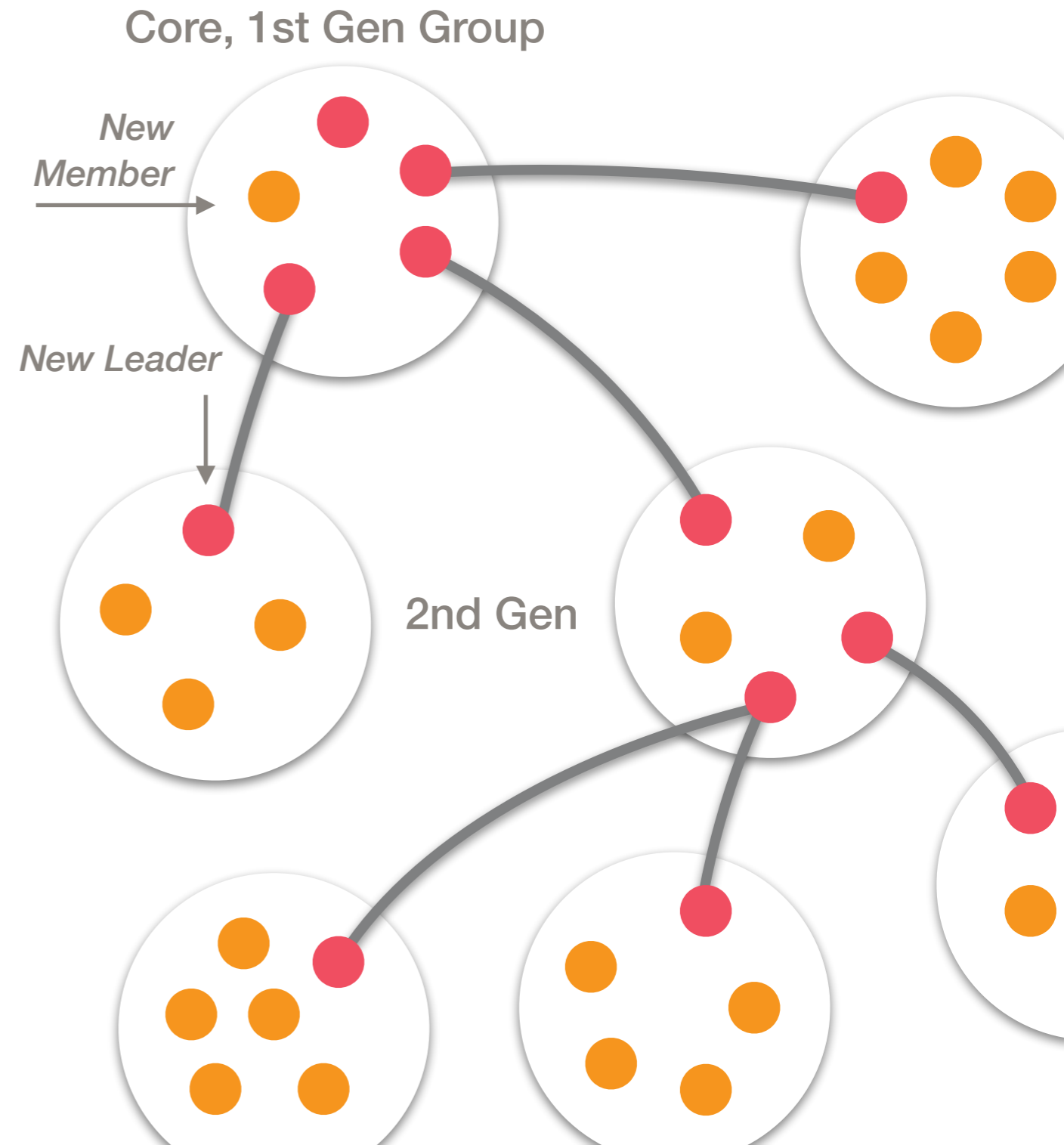
The ideal example for small groups is the family unit.

In the ideal family, two mature parents help bring children to maturity, even though each child may be at a unique level of development. The end goal is for the next generation to mature to the point where they can start their own families and the process repeats. We know this works.

When the children become adults and start their own family, they don't cease being part of the original family, but their interactions, needs, and relationships do change.

Here's how this works in a small group. The first generation group's members should mature to the point where they can start groups of their own, but they don't need to leave the original group to do it. They just begin their own group and stay in the original group as well, committing to participate in two groups. This allows for a healthy leader to be pastored and to shepherd others at the same time.

A benefit to this model, as opposed to other cell group models, is that no divisions or splitting of groups are necessary for growth.



Types of Small Groups

Pick a group, any group...

Small groups can be centered around a neighborhood, hobby or interest, location, Bible study theme, an age group or station in life, etc. Here are a few potential examples:



Youth Bible Study Group



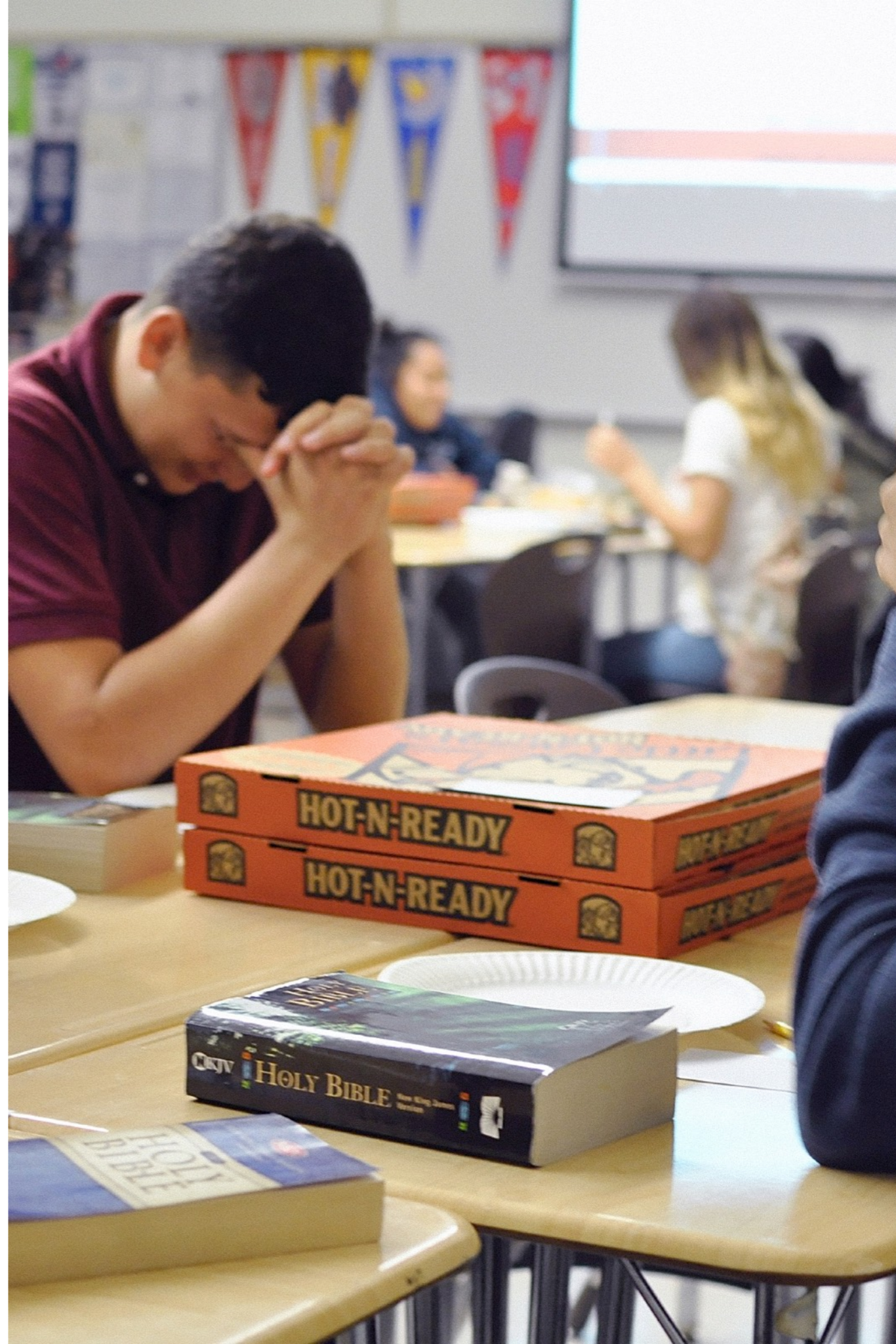
Lunchtime Group (at Acme Co.)



La Sierra Bible Study Group



Moms at Chik-fil-a Group



Meeting Agenda

Depending on the type of group, the leader may choose to adopt one of the options presented here.

Simplified Version 15-20 minutes

1. Fellowship (food is optional)
2. Prayer/Worship
3. Discipleship (Bible Study)
 1. Lesson plan may be condensed or a simple devotion
 2. Questions
4. Announcements
 1. Events (church or group)
 2. Special days (birthdays, anniversaries)
 3. Special needs

Deluxe Version 60-90 minutes

1. Fellowship (recommend appetizers/desserts)
2. Prayer
3. Introductions (for new or newer members)
4. Review purposes (3 ships)
5. Ice breaker (question & discussion)
6. Worship/Singing
7. Testimonies
8. Discipleship (Bible Study)
 1. Lesson plan may be condensed or a simple devotion
 2. Questions
9. Vision for the group
10. Announcements
 1. Events (church or group)
 2. Special days (birthdays, anniversaries)
 3. Special needs

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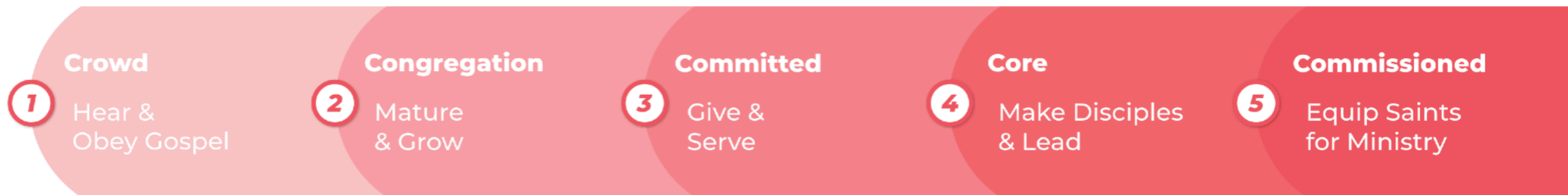
Responsibilities Of a Small Group Leader

The main prerequisite for leading a small group is to complete ILC Riverside's Growth Track through stepFOUR, Discover Ministry Class and to have signed the Leadership Covenant.



Community

Come & See





Responsibilities

Of a Small Group Leader

Once you have started a small group, what is expected of the leader? Practical things may include checking on the absent or regular communication regarding group meetings, praying for and visiting the sick, modeling a proper appearance/attitude, praying over each member, tracking their progress, helping to coordinate a baby shower, and a host of other things. Here's the primary focus:



Communication with Pastor or Leader

What went well or went wrong in the last meeting? How do I handle this question?



Disciple individuals for growth

What level is each member at? How can I encourage them to take the next step?



Control atmosphere of the group

How can I set the tone for the group to be an encouraging, positive environment?



Protect unity within the group & church

How can I convey to the group that they are part of a kingdom much larger than the group?



Minister to needs in the moment

What needs are there in our group that I can respond to now or coordinate soon?



Promote multiplication of the group

Who is being developed into the next small group leader out of my group?

Common Pitfalls Of a Small Group System

Some pastors have a terrible taste in their mouth over small groups based on bad experiences that, for the most part, can be avoided. Here are some primary ways to ruin a small group:

1. Let the group go off-topic and beyond schedule.
2. Assign all the work to one or two people.
3. Encourage negative and critical talk (or gossip) by participating in it or ignoring it when it happens.
4. Share a doctrine with the group you've never heard preached in our church before.
5. Allow business deals between members, whether that is life insurance or car sales.
6. Don't control the meeting and let non-leaders teach whatever they feel like sharing.
7. Counsel people on deeply personal matters, handing out advice like candy.
8. And above all, make sure you focus on simply maintaining your group without regard to growth.



Just because there are some risks, doesn't mean it's not worth the effort.

Tools & Resources

As a small group leader, it shouldn't be up to you to do all of the work and reinvent the wheel. The church will be careful to give you tools and resources to enable you to be a successful leader. These will include:

- Invitations
- Lesson plans to study with your group
- Kids coloring pages
- Worship/music resources
- An agenda/order/structure for the meeting
- Church announcements to share
- Reference documents:
 - Purpose statements (vision, structure)
 - Basic Bible doctrine (especially for questions)
 - Group leader guidelines
- Digital organization system (Church Community Builder or CCB) for attendance, member tracking, note-taking, messaging/communication, etc.

For CCB & LEAD app training videos:

<https://www.youtube.com/user/ChurchCommBuilder>



Questions?



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