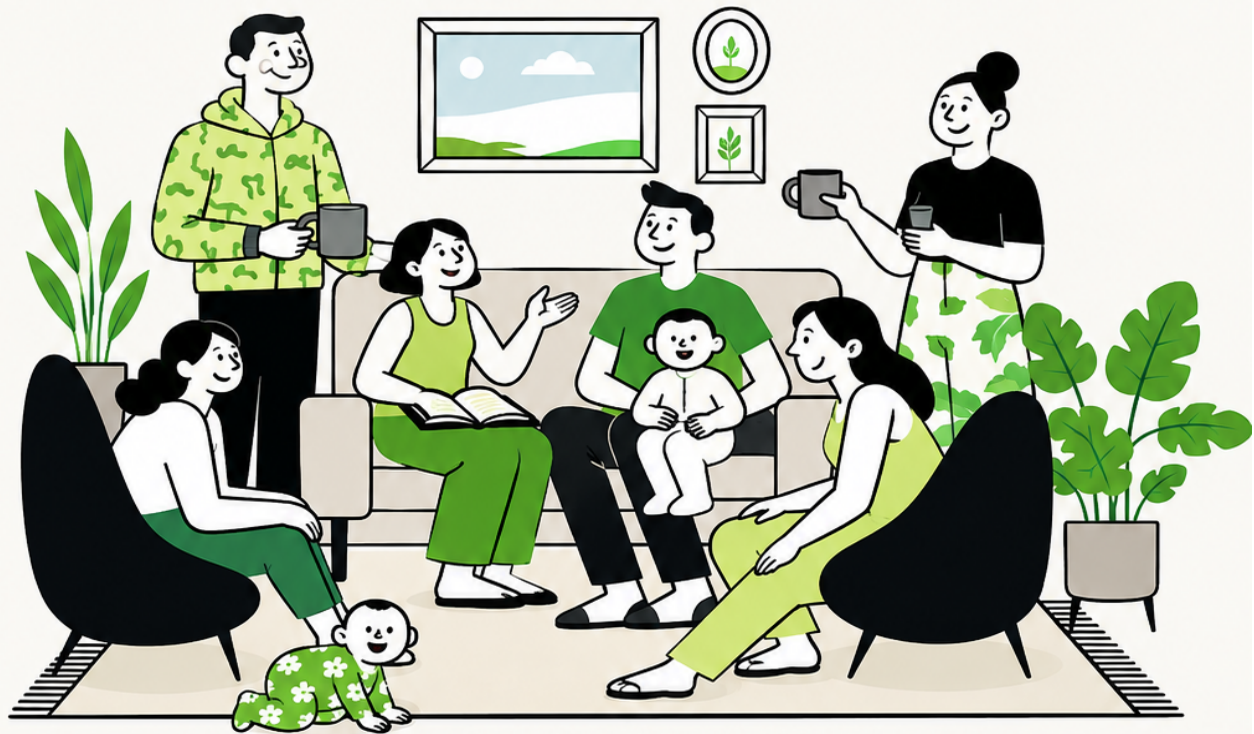


# HOUSE CHURCH

## — H A N D B O O K —

A PRACTICAL GUIDE TO BUILDING, GROWING,  
AND MULTIPLYING HOUSE CHURCHES



— TOGETHER • ON MISSION • FOR JESUS —



**LIVING**  
CHURCH

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## Introduction

*“A biblical church meeting can theoretically take place anywhere. Nevertheless, we believe a house offers a highly effective setting to generate the spiritual intimacy, closeness, and security required to walk out the level of love expected of members in a New Testament church. Now, many argue that the New Testament Christians met in homes purely because they couldn’t gather elsewhere. While there may be some pragmatic truth to that argument, we do not believe having access to public buildings now should decrease the biblical example of house gatherings found in the Scriptures.”* **-Dale Partridge, The Basics of Biblical House Church**

*“You know that I have not hesitated to preach anything that would be helpful to you but have taught you publicly and from house to house.”* **-The Apostle Paul, Acts 20:20**

“House to house.” I love that from the Apostle Paul. I also love the above quote from Dale Partridge. I love his emphasis that just because we can build or have access to public buildings that shouldn’t cause us to de-emphasize the example, and dare I say “pattern” of first century church gatherings meeting in homes.

It’s hard to believe when I think about it, but my family and I have been involved in sharing life and leading house churches for nearly twenty years. These years leading house churches have taught us so much about what it means to not just “go to” church but to “be” church, to “live” church as disciples of Jesus in community with other disciples of Jesus living out the mission of Jesus.

Our personal journey into house church began in Dublin, Ireland with a group of 10-15 older high school and young college students. We would gather together in our home Sunday evenings in north Dublin, share a meal, sing songs, engage in studying the Bible together, pray for one another, and throughout the week care for each other as best we could. We didn’t really call it “house church,” or know what we really were, but looking back I can see how we were becoming a church family who would often meet in a home seeking to follow Jesus. We would share Scripture together, share life, share in Jesus’ mission throughout the week, and some of those who were part of that first “house church” in Dublin are now leaders sent out leading and pastoring new churches forming in that city.

Little did we know then, but just a couple years after sharing life and leading a house church in Ireland, God would send us back to the States to do the same with some dear friends. Since returning we have continued living church in the form of house churches in Cincinnati, Ohio and Northern Kentucky.

I share our journey and the years we’ve been doing house church only to show that what’s shared in this handbook comes not just from theory or study, but also from personal experience. We’ve made a lot of mistakes along the way, but also have learned a few things about house church which we hope will be of help to you.

This House Church Handbook doesn’t cover everything there is to know or learn or discover about living life as a house church. It’s not intended to be a prescription for how every house

church is to function, but more a description of what a biblical house church could look like and why. The purpose for this handbook is to simply provide you with some short answers to house church questions we are often asked. We hope it will help you and others gain a little more understanding for why we believe house churches are and can be a beautiful expression for living in community as disciples of Jesus with other disciples of Jesus who are living out the mission of Jesus. *Welcome to the House Church Handbook!*

Let's begin with answering the "why" behind house church. It seems like a good place to start.

## **Why House Church?**

This is not an exhaustive list sharing all the reasons for why house church is a viable expression for church, but these are some of the most important reasons.

**Why House Church? *Because house churches follow the biblical pattern of Jesus' ministry in homes.***

Throughout Jesus' ministry we see ...

- Jesus healing people inside Peter & Andrew's home (Mark 1:29-34)
- Jesus leading a Bible Study and healing a paralyzed man (Mark 2:1-2)
- Jesus spending time in Matthew's (Levi's) house with a bunch of Matthew's unsaved friends (Mark 2:13-15)
- A crowd coming to Jesus' home (Mark 3:20-21)
- Jesus telling a demon possessed man he just healed to go back to his home and tell his family what Jesus did for him (Mark 5:17-19)
- Jesus resurrecting a 12 year old girl who died back to life (Mark 5:42)
- Jesus encouraging His disciples to enter people's homes as they share the gospel (Mark 6:10-13)
- Jesus teaching His disciples inside a home (Mark 7:14-23).
- Jesus healing a Gentile woman's daughter in a home (Mark 7:24-26)
- Jesus entering a house to teach His disciples about casting out demons (Mark 9:26-29)
- Jesus spending time inside Simon the Leper's home (Mark 14:3)
- Jesus eating the Last Supper with His disciples in an upper room inside a home (Mark 14:12-18)
- Jesus visiting Martha & Mary's home (John 11)
- Jesus meeting His frightened disciples inside a home where they're hiding (John 20:19-23)
- Jesus meeting doubting Thomas inside a home (John 20:26-29)

**Why House Church? *Because house churches follow the biblical pattern of where 1st century churches primarily gathered.***

In the first century we see ...

- The church in Jerusalem, Israel meeting in their homes (Acts 2:46)
- The church in Ephesus, Turkey receiving teaching in their homes from the apostle Paul as he would teach going from "house to house" (Acts 20:20)
- The church in Rome, Italy meeting in the home of a couple named Priscilla and Aquila (Romans 16:3-5)
- When Priscilla and Aquila lived in Ephesus, Turkey the church met in their home in that city (1 Corinthians 16:19)
- The church in Colossae, Greece met in the home of a woman named Nympha (Colossians 4:15)
- A different house church in Colossae, Greece seems to have met in the home of a man named Philemon (Philemon 1:2)
- The apostle Paul instructs his young apprentice Titus to appoint pastors in every town on the island of Crete, an island known for its numerous cities. The church did not have its

own buildings, so carrying out this instruction is possible because the church met primarily in homes (Titus 1:5)

**Why House Church? Because historical evidence reveals house churches were the primary gathering place for early disciples of Jesus.**

Rodney Stark in his book, **The Rise of Christianity (a study of 1st Century Church Movement)** writes, “Archeological evidence shows that from very early days, house churches were clearly identifiable - the neighbors would have been entirely aware that these were Christian gathering places.”

Michael Kruger in his book **Christianity at the Crossroads: How the Second Century Shaped the Future of the Church** writes regarding house churches, “As a church began in a particular city it would have often been small enough to meet in a single house and would have been governed simply by a group of elders. As such congregations grew in numbers and were forced to meet in additional houses, there may have been situations where a single group of elders found themselves ruling over multiple congregations in different locations throughout the city. These multiple (house) congregations would have been naturally connected by the fact that they were led by the same group of elders. Thus, Christians in a given city, even worshiping in separate house churches, would have been able to maintain some common identity under the leadership of a single body of presbyters (elders).”

**Why House Church? Because house church is what forms from disciples who are living out Jesus’ mission.**

Jesus gave His disciples a mission - *make disciples of all nations* (Matt. 28:19-20). As these disciples of Jesus made new disciples of Jesus, house churches then formed. House churches not only formed, but also multiplied and multiplied leaders. House churches were the pattern for and became the product of making new disciples of Jesus.

Based on this, we can see how maybe house church isn’t just “a way” to do church, but maybe the actual pattern for living as a community of disciples of Jesus. House churches and multiplying house churches in cities and regions seemed to be the pattern of the 1st century followers of Jesus for being church and living the mission of Jesus to make disciples of all nations (Matthew 28:19-20).

**Why House Church? Because house churches are not dependent on a church provided program for living Jesus’ mission, but on relationships.**

Like Jesus with the Apostles, Paul with Titus, and Aquila & Priscilla with Apollos, house church by its nature emphasizes disciple making over programs. Disciple making through the house church happens as people share life and relationships, and is not dependent on a church provided program.

When we read Acts 2:42-47 we see the first church being highly relational with each other. They study God’s Word together. They share life together and meet one another’s needs. They are visible in their community winning the favor of all the people. All this is happening in the context

of relationships with one another. They didn't gather to just come sit in a service, then leave. They gathered to share life together, even daily, which included gathering in a home.

The relationships within house churches were the environment or soil for growing as a disciple and making disciples of Jesus in the first century. From this first church's example (Acts 2:42-47), we see how people are the program for making disciples. If you're a disciple of Jesus, you're the program for accomplishing Jesus' mission.

House churches were also the environment where sending missionaries took place. When we read Acts 13:1-15 we see a community of disciples of Jesus praying, seeking the Spirit, and sending some of their own to other cities to share the good news of Jesus.

This means that the mission and growth of making disciples of Jesus is not dependent on a program that meets in a church building, but rather on people living in discipleship relationships with one another. This means discipleship can happen then anytime, in any place, with any disciple. The environment of house church seems to provide or emphasize these kinds of disciple-making relationships.

**Why House Church? *Because house churches are flexible, adaptable, and reproducible.***

The first century church grew exponentially without buildings, and in a time of rampant persecution (see Acts 7-8). Persecution or pandemic doesn't stop the mission or growth of house churches reproducing.

Like we see from the 1st century church, because house churches are not dependent on a building or money to keep the mission going, and are often small enough to gather anywhere, anytime, in any situation house churches can flex and adapt to cultural and political climates that discourage large group gatherings, even where it is illegal to worship Jesus (i.e. China, Iran).

House churches provide a flexibility and adaptability that continues the making and multiplying of disciples of Jesus and house churches despite cultural or political obstacles.

**Why House Church? *Because house churches provide each disciple the opportunity to share in the gifts of the Spirit and in the mission of making disciples of all nations.***

The Apostle Paul encourages disciples in the context of their house church to use their Spirit-given gifts for the growth and maturity into Christ (1 Corinthians 12). We also see Paul and Peter encouraging disciples of Jesus sharing life in house churches to live the mission of Jesus (2 Corinthians 5:20, 1 Peter 2:9-12).

This means that in the house church every disciple is needed and every disciple is an ambassador of Jesus participating in the growth and multiplication of disciples of Jesus for the glory of God. House church provides an environment where every disciple can more readily use their Spirit-given gifts and live the mission rather than defer the gifts and mission to a select few leaders. .

We believe there's a lot of reasons for why House Church is not only a viable expression or form of church, but actually a biblical pattern for church to be seriously considered. This does not mean other forms or expressions of church are wrong or sinful. There's a lot of good being done

for Jesus and His Kingdom from all forms of church. There are traditional or legacy churches that do a wonderful job at making disciples. Different forms of church are needed to reach different types of people in different cultures.

That being said, from having served and led in both traditional and house church environments, I can tell you house church seems to be the biblical pattern or church form that provides an effective and much needed environment for fostering disciples of Jesus living the mission of Jesus, which is to “Go, *make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, and teaching them to observe all I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age*” (Matthew 28:19-20).

If the reasons for house church stir you to want to know more, then the next question that needs to be answered is - “What is a House Church?”.

## What is a House Church?

When Jesus said, “*I will build my church...*” (Matthew 5:16), He was not talking about building a building with brick and mortar. He was talking about building a people. Church is not a building, it's a people. So, since the Church is a people, then what kind of people is a House Church?

**A house church is a people** who have repented of their sins and believe Jesus is the only way to salvation and the hope for every person, family, neighborhood, and city (Acts 4:12, 13:38-39, 1 Timothy 1:1, Colossians 1:27).

**A house church is a people** who live like a spiritual family, and are committed to following Jesus together much like the first century house churches we read about in the New Testament (Acts 20:20, Romans 16:3-5, 1 Corinthians 4:14-17, Colossians 4:15, 1 Thessalonians 2:1-12).

**A house church is a people** who exist to bring glory to God (1 Corinthians 10:31), and make new disciples of Jesus as they live like missionaries living the mission of Jesus, being accountable to one another, loving one another and those around them (Matthew 28:19-20, John 14:15, 1 John 4:7-12, 1 Peter 2:9-12).

**A house church is a people** led and shepherded by a biblically-qualified pastor who meets the biblical qualifications as described in 1 Timothy 3:1-7 and Titus 1:5-9. This pastor provides teaching, oversight, care, and training in the Bible seeking to train and equip the house church to follow Jesus, making new disciples of Jesus (Matthew 28:19-20, Ephesians 4:12-16). These pastors are the shepherds of the house churches and oversee practicing the ordinances of communion (1 Corinthians 11) and baptism (Matthew 28:19-20), as well as church discipline when needed (Matthew 18, 1 Timothy 5:19-20).

**A house church is a people** who practice the ordinances of baptism (Matthew 28:19-20), Lord's Supper (1 Corinthians 11), and church discipline (1 Timothy 5:19-20).

**A house church is a people** sending and starting new house church communities locally and globally for the purpose of accomplishing Jesus' mission of reaching neighborhoods, cities, and the world with His good news (Acts 1:8, 11:19-30, 13:1-5, 14:21-23, 16:5, Titus 1:5, Matt 28:18-19).

**A house church is a people** seeking, when possible, to connect with a larger family of house churches within its region/city. Like the Apostle Paul who taught publicly and from house to house (Acts 20:20) as house churches grow and multiply, churches come together for gatherings to worship and advance the Kingdom of Jesus, because they believe they can do more together than alone (Acts 20:17,20, Titus 1:5, 2 Cor. 8-9).

**A house church is a people** who believe homes are a primary place for ministry not a refuge from it, and are the pattern and primary place for meeting and gathering as a church (Acts 2:46, 20:20, Romans 16:3-5, 1 Corinthians 16:19, Colossians 4:15, Philemon 1:2).

If house church is a viable and even the expected form for church, and house church is a people, then the next question to be asked would seem to be - “*What then does a House Church do?*”

## What Does a House Church Do?

When it comes to answering this specific question, it seems like a good place to find the answer is to see what instructions Jesus gave the first disciples when they gathered together.

One of the first instructions we see Jesus giving the first disciples is to, *“Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age”* (Matthew 28:19-20).

Jesus later tells them, *“But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth”* (Acts 1:8).

**What do House Churches do? If house churches are made up of disciples of Jesus, then according to Jesus, house churches are witnesses of Jesus who are making new disciples of Jesus.** Simply stated - house churches make more disciples of Jesus. But, how?

According to Luke’s account in The Acts of The Apostles, we see what the first disciples did when they gathered together. What did they do? Luke tells us when he writes, *“They devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. Everyone was filled with awe at the many wonders and signs performed by the apostles. All the believers were together and had everything in common. They sold property and possessions to give to anyone who 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).

Later in his account, Luke records how disciples of Jesus would gather and send one another from their church to make more disciples of Jesus and multiply churches. He writes, *“Now in the church at Antioch there were prophets and teachers: Barnabas, Simeon called Niger, Lucius of Cyrene, Manaen (who had been brought up with Herod the tetrarch) and Saul. While they were worshiping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, ‘Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them.’ So after they had fasted and prayed, they placed their hands on them and sent them off. The two of them, sent on their way by the Holy Spirit, went down to Seleucia and sailed from there to Cyprus. When they arrived at Salamis, they proclaimed the word of God in the Jewish synagogues. John was with them as their helper”* (Acts 13:1-5).

So, **what do House Churches do?** Well, taking our cues from the first actions of the disciples as recorded in The Acts of The Apostles, house churches...

- **Share Scripture together.** *“Devote themselves to the apostles teaching...”* (Acts 2:42)
  - Definition: The studying and teaching of the Bible individually and together for growing in knowing Jesus and obedience to Him.
- **Share Life together.** *“Devote themselves to...the fellowship...breaking of bread and prayer...and they sold property and possessions to give to anyone who had need...continued to meet together.....broke bread in their homes and ate together...”* (Acts 2:42-46)

- Definition: The meeting of needs of those within your house church community. This involves eating together, playing together, encouraging and serving one another, sharing material, physical, and spiritual needs we have, sharing possessions, finances, etc, and making sure needs are being met. Doing life together.
- **Share Mission together.** *“Go and make disciples of all nations...be my witnesses.....enjoying the favor of all the people...”* (Matthew 28:18-20, Acts 2:47)
  - Definition: The meeting of needs of those who have yet to become a disciple of Jesus. This meeting of needs is done with the intent of people moving from unbelief to saving belief in Jesus, becoming new disciples of Jesus.
- **Send One Another.** *“So after they had fasted and prayed, they placed their hands on them and sent them off. The two of them, sent on their way by the Holy Spirit...”* (Acts 13:1-5)
  - Definition: Living out your missionary identity as a sent missionary in the place you live, work, and play. This could include praying for those who need Jesus, engaging and sharing your faith in Jesus with others, seeking to start or be part of a new Bible study with those who need Jesus, support or be part of a new house church, ultimately leading to the making of new disciples of Jesus and the multiplication of new house church communities.

According to the words of Jesus and what we observe from the first and early disciples of Jesus, these four practices at minimum should be lived and visible by the people and community who are sharing and living church together. The above list is not an exhaustive list by any means, but if we dig to the core practices of what a house church does, we can see it should involve no less than these four practices. In the house church network my family and I share life with, we refer to these as the **Four Practices of Discipleship**.

We can also see that what a house church does goes beyond just the scheduled weekly or bi-weekly meeting. It's nearly impossible to live all four practices in just a once a week or every other week meeting. House churches who are Sharing Scripture together, Sharing Life together, Sharing Mission together, and Sending One Another are seeing each other and connecting with each other beyond just the regular meeting time.

Also, if we think about it, these practices aren't what just house churches do. These are what any and every church should be doing. It's not only what we do as a church, it's how we make disciples of Jesus.

**If you currently share life with a house church, or someday plan to, and someone asked you what your house church does, or how you go and make disciples, what would you tell them?** My hope is at the bare minimum you could tell them your house church makes disciples of Jesus by Sharing Scripture together, Sharing Life together, Sharing Mission together, and Sending one another.

But, what about leadership? Who leads a house church?

## **What about Leadership? What Does Leadership of a House Church Look Like?**

Maybe you're beginning to consider the reasons for house church being viable, and that maybe it's the pattern for how church should look. Maybe you're beginning to get your mind around the idea of what a house church actually is, and what a house church does, and the practices for making disciples of Jesus. But, what about leadership?

### **What does leadership of a house church actually look like?**

The answer to this question depends on if you believe a house church is truly a church or not. If you believe a house church is a church, and we see in the New Testament qualifications specifically for those who oversee and lead and shepherd churches; then to be consistent, it would seem one must then believe leadership for house churches is the same church leadership we see in the New Testament for any church, which includes every house church shepherded by a biblically qualified pastor.

This means then, not just anyone can lead a house church. If it truly is a church and not just a small group, cell group, or missionary community, then it needs a leader or leaders overseeing it who have a Spirit given burden and Spirit given character as described by Paul in his letters to Timothy and Titus (1 Timothy 3, Titus 1). This also means before we lay hands on a group of people and call it a church, we will see that they have a biblically qualified pastor leading them.

Earlier in this handbook when describing what a house church is, we shared how *“a house church is a people led and shepherded by a biblically-qualified pastor who meets the biblical qualifications as described in 1 Timothy 3:1-7 and Titus 1:5-9. This pastor provides teaching, oversight, care, and training in the Bible seeking to train and equip the house church to follow Jesus, making new disciples of Jesus (Matthew 28:19-20, Ephesians 4:12-16). These pastors are the shepherds of the house churches and oversee practicing the ordinances of Communion (1 Corinthians 11) and Baptism (Matthew 28:19-20), as well as church discipline when needed (Matthew 18, 1 Timothy 5:19-20).”*

So, what does leadership of a house church look like? It looks like a people being led and shepherded by a pastor who has a burden given from the Holy Spirit to shepherd God's people (Acts 20:28), and meets the character qualifications described by God through the apostle Paul in his letters to Timothy and Titus (1 Timothy 3:1-7, Titus 1:5-9).

***But what do you do if you have a community of disciples of Jesus, but no pastor to lead them?***

Then you do what Paul told Titus to do. You go find men who have the burden and character required to pastor, and you appoint them over the group to lead and shepherd them (Titus 1:5).

***But what if you can't find anyone with the burden and the character required?*** Then you pray and wait until God raises up someone who meets these biblical qualifications to pastor them.

***But won't this possibly limit the speed of multiplication of churches?*** Possibly. It doesn't mean the group can't meet and study the Bible together, love and serve one another, but before we lay hands on someone and send that someone as the pastor over the group and call them a house church, we will wait until we see both burden and character in a person ready to shepherd them.

Paul cautioned against laying hands on someone too quickly to lead God's people (1 Timothy 5:22), so we want to take the same caution.

Also, something to consider is that because house churches are not dependent on having a building or money to start, the multiplication of new house churches can sometimes happen quickly. Instead of needing a pastor, AND a building, AND money to start, the only need for house church multiplication is the need for a biblically qualified pastor. Yes, that can take time, but if there is pastoral apprenticeship happening within house churches then the pace of multiplication of churches usually increases because you don't have the obstacles of needing a building and money.

### ***What does leadership of multiple house churches in a region look like?***

Let's imagine your house church grows and multiplies into another house church on the other side of town. Then, the same thing happens again. Now you have multiple house churches in the same town. What do you do then? What does leadership look like if there's multiple house churches in a town or region? It can look like Deacons and Elders.

**Deacons.** As house churches grow and multiply, the leadership of deacons would be needed to serve the house churches to ensure practical and physical needs of the members are being met. We see this leadership role of deacons expressed in first century house churches in the city and region of Jerusalem (Acts 6:1-6, Romans 16:1, 1 Timothy 3:8-13).

**Elders.** Again, as house churches grow and multiply in a city or region, we see a similar need for a team of elders who share leadership providing oversight for the house churches in their city or region. These elders primarily see that the spiritual needs of the house churches are being met. We also see shared leadership of elders in first century house churches or multiple house churches in a city or region (Acts 14:21-23, Acts 20, Philippians 1:1, James 5:14, 1 Peter 5:1-2).

This question about leadership and house church often presents another question we've heard in our experience leading house churches. People will often ask, ***"What makes a house church different from a small group or missional community?"***\*

One of, if not the primary difference, has to do with leadership. Small groups, microchurches, cell groups, missional communities typically do not require a biblically qualified pastor leading them. They are usually led by members of a church, but don't require biblically qualified pastoral leadership. They also do not have deacons or elders as offices or roles within the group serving and overseeing. Also, these groups usually practice baptisms or communion with the larger body of the church they are part of, rather than within the small group itself.

\*In addition to leadership being a major difference, a house church also functions autonomously as its own church, unlike most microchurches, cell groups, small groups, and missional communities. As stated earlier, multiple house churches can exist as part of a larger network collaborating together yet remain autonomous churches, whereas these other groups are typically not considered churches or autonomous.

When it comes to leadership, house churches, if truly functioning as a New Testament church, will have biblically qualified pastoral leadership, and as needs arise will implement the leadership of deacons and elders along with the practice of baptisms, communion, and church discipline.

## Conclusion

As we said in the introduction, we know this House Church Handbook doesn't cover everything to learn about living life as a house church. There's so much more we could say, which is why we added the APPENDICES section (\*smile\*). Even though there's more to say even beyond the Appendices, we do hope this little handbook provides some understanding for why and how house church is a beautiful expression of church and an effective environment for making disciples of Jesus living the mission of Jesus.

It bears repeating...

*"A biblical church meeting can theoretically take place anywhere. Nevertheless, we believe a house offers a highly effective setting to generate the spiritual intimacy, closeness, and security required to walk out the level of love expected of members in a New Testament church. - Dale Patridge, The Basics of Biblical House Church*

*"You know that I have not hesitated to preach anything that would be helpful to you but have taught you publicly and from house to house." - The Apostle Paul, Acts 20:20*

## APPENDICES

### **Appendix A:** What Does a House Church Meeting Include?

EMAIL FOR A FREE RESOURCE: Discovery Bible Study Method Tool

**Each house church meeting will look a little different than others. But from our experience, most house church meetings include:**

- *Food* (a potluck meal, or dessert, or snacks, coffee, etc). Not all house church meetings include food, but we encourage having food as part of your meeting as meals were often a regular part of Jesus' ministry and provide a natural opportunity for sharing life together.
- *A Participatory Teaching from the Bible* (not a 30-40 minute sermon). Many house churches use the Discovery Bible Study method as their form of teaching.
- *Praying Together*. Prayer is also a great way to include the children in the house church.
- *Music Worship*. Not all house church meetings include music worship, but many do. Music is often included as a way to involve the children in the meeting by the singing of age appropriate children worship songs.
- *Fellowship Time*. This usually happens organically before and after or during the meal or dessert time.
- *Baptisms*. As new disciples are made, baptisms will become part of your meetings when necessary. In our experience, through the years we have had multiple baptisms using our hot tub on our back porch, or a neighbor's pool, even a metal feeding trough.
- *Lord's Supper*. Consistent participation in taking the Lord's Supper is also included in house church meetings. We know of house churches who take the Lord's Supper every meeting. We know of others who take it together once a month or every other month.

### **How Frequent Do House Churches Meet and Where?**

- We encourage house churches to meet every week, or every other week.
- Some house churches meet Sunday mornings, others meet weeknights.
- Some house churches meet in the same home every meeting, others rotate meetings in homes of different members. Where the climate is warm year round, we know of some house churches who meet regularly outside in local parks.
  - SIDE NOTE: We have found rotating homes for meetings provides a natural opportunity for the host of the meeting to invite their neighbors and friends into their home who may not otherwise come to a meeting at someone else's home.

## **Appendix B: What Do You Do with Children During a House Church Meeting?**

There are many great thoughts and practices when it comes to serving and involving children in a house church. Caring for and serving children is an opportunity for making disciples because that's exactly what it is. We encourage house churches to involve children as much as possible during the house church meeting and service opportunities.

### **Involving children can be done in a variety of ways. For example...**

- Singing age appropriate kids worship songs ("My God is so Big", "Jesus loves Me", etc.)
- Asking them to pray or share prayer requests
- Inviting them to answer questions
- Serving the group by helping during the meal, clean up, etc.
- Planning community service/ mission projects where children can help

We understand from experience that the primary time when child supervision is needed is typically during the Bible Study/Sharing Scripture time of a house church meeting. Here are some practices to consider for caring for children during that time:

#### **1. House Church Members Sign Up and Rotate**

- Distribute a sign-up sheet asking people to take a week to supervise the children. Encourage how this is a way to disciple children by loving them and serving them. Supervising children should be seen as the same as feeding the hungry, serving the homeless. It's just as important.
- If no one is signed up for a particular week then no supervision is provided for that week. In this case, inform parents ahead of time (via email, text, phone) so parents can make arrangements for their own children (*preferably bring toys, coloring pages for their own children*).
- We know of some house churches where it is not optional for an adult or older teen to not help in some way with the kids. It is assumed (understood) that every adult and older teen in the house will at some point serve in this way.
- If desired, provide a curriculum/Bible Story book, toys, etc. for those supervising children during their scheduled week.

#### **2. Hire outside Babysitting/Childcare.**

- House Church agrees to take a collection to pay or hire outside babysitting. We would encourage background checks on any person being hired or paid.

#### **3. Work with a local Christian college, school, or ministry (i.e. Child Evangelism Fellowship, local Christian School, etc.) to provide care during house church meetings.**

- Some Christian high schools or Christian colleges require students to have service or ministry hours. Caring for children during a house church meeting is a way for these students to not only meet a need for the house church but also their required service hour needs. We would encourage background checks on any person or student being hired or paid.

#### **4. Keep and involve children during the house church meeting and teaching.**

- Expectation must be made known to the house church that this will mean interruptions are perfectly acceptable. All should be encouraged to be understanding and willing to serve one another's children if needed during the meeting time.

## **Appendix C:** Ways House Churches Can Do What House Churches Do (Live the 4 Practices of Discipleship)

### EMAIL FOR A FREE RESOURCE: 4 Practices of Discipleship Worksheet

The 4 Practices of Discipleship Worksheet can be a helpful tool for you, your house church, or your Bible study as you seek to live the 4 Practices of Discipleship together. Each person can fill out the worksheet listing ways they specifically can live these practices. We recommend quarterly going over the worksheet together with your house church. The worksheet can also be a source of encouragement as people see how they are growing as a disciple and in the mission of making disciples.

Below are some examples of ways house churches can live each practice...

#### **SHARING SCRIPTURE together can look like...**

- Bible study and teaching during house church meetings
- House Church Men's Bible Study
- House Church Ladies Bible Study
- Members sharing with one another in group chats what they're reading & learning
- House Church members participating in the same Bible Reading plan
- House Church kids memorizing Scripture together with the adults
- House Church members meeting in smaller huddles during the week to discuss the Bible together

#### **SHARING LIFE together can look like ...**

- House Church regular meetings
- Dinners together
- Prayer nights
- Sharing prayer requests during the week in a group app (e.g. WhatsApp, GroupMe, etc)
- Holiday parties together
- Wedding and baby showers
- Monthly Meals together as a House Church
- Babysitting, kids play days, park meet ups, etc.
- Movie nights, game nights, firepit nights

#### **SHARING MISSION together...**

- Pray for each other to live as everyday missionaries pointing people to Jesus
  - EMAIL US FOR A FREE RESOURCE: The Missionary Pathway
- Pray over names of people to believe and follow Jesus
- Pray for missionaries around the world and for the gospel to reach the nations
- Prayer walks together in neighborhoods and local places
- Invite people to your house church meeting or event
- Support financially a local or global mission or missionary
- Serve together or provide a service at local community events, non-profits, with neighbors, etc. Here are some examples:
  - Yard work
  - Park clean up

- Wedding and baby showers for neighbors and coworkers
- Back to School parties
- Parade volunteers
- Meals to neighbors who are sick
- Meals for Firefighters
- Hospital volunteers
- Local Pregnancy Centers
- Book clubs
- Rec league (volleyball, pickleball, frisbee golf, etc)
- Foster care
- Local school volunteer
- Pro Dads Breakfasts at local schools
- Senior Centers & Nursing Homes
- Neighborhood Parties (Holidays are a great opportunity to spend time w/ neighbors)
- CarePortal.org

### **SENDING one another...**

- Pray for one another to have boldness to share Jesus with others
- Visit the same coffee shop with the purpose of getting to know people there
- See each other as a missionary in the local neighborhood and city
- Pray for each other's workplaces and to see the workplace as a mission field
- Provide financial support for members going on local or global mission trips
- Provide financial support for members who need supplies to start a Bible study at work, at home, or in their neighborhood
- Invite someone to your house church meeting or event
- Go on a short term mission trip together
- Start or support Bible Studies with those who have yet to believe & follow Jesus
- Ask God to raise up and send from your house church everyday missionaries, pastors and leaders with a burden and the character to start new Bible studies and house churches

## **Appendix D:** Should Multiple House Churches in a City or Region Gather Together Regularly?

LISTEN TO EPISODE #2 OF THE LIVING ROOM PODCAST:  
“The Importance of House Churches or Microchurches Being Connected”

We understand your house church might be the only house church in your local area. We also understand having multiple house churches in your city, town, or community is not the case for everyone reading this. But the hope would be that your house church grows and multiplies.

Let's imagine your house church multiplies into one or two or more house churches. Is there value in these house churches gathering or collaborating together on occasion? The answer is a resounding YES!

Here are several reasons why we believe so...

- 1** - *It seems to be the pattern we see in the New Testament.* In the first century we see house churches in one region helping churches in other regions. The Apostle Paul in his travels to Galatia, Macedonia, and Achaia takes up a collection from house churches in these regions for struggling Christians living in Jerusalem (2 Corinthians 8-9, 1 Corinthians 16:1-4, Romans 15). For this to happen, there had to be some sense of collaboration and connection between house churches.
- 2** - *You can do more to advance the Kingdom of God together than any one house church could on its own.* As we see from the first century travels of Paul, house churches can pool resources together to help meet needs of disciples of Jesus in other house churches.
- 3** - *House churches connecting with each other can receive and give encouragement to one another, they can share in equipping, and collaborate together on local and global mission endeavors.*
- 4** - *It provides the sharing of spiritual gifts.* For example, house churches could gather for larger meetings using those with strong teaching and evangelistic gifts to further equip the churches.

What Can Multiple House Churches Collaborating Together Look Like? *It can look like...*

- Multiple house churches in a region meeting together once a month or twice a month for prayer meetings, fellowship, encouragement, teaching and equipping, and collaboration in mission endeavors.
- Age specific meetings, such as for middle and high school students. Some students may be the only students in their house church, so providing something for students from multiple house churches can connect them together for encouragement and equipping.
- Mission Trips. It can look like house churches gathering together to fund and send members from various house churches in a region on local and global mission trips.
- Leadership Training. Pastors or leaders from multiple house churches can gather together regularly for prayer, encouragement, and training.

Hopefully from these examples you can see the value of multiple house churches in a region gathering and collaborating together. If your house church is the only one in your area we

encourage connecting with a house church network (even online) like The Living Room, where you can receive some of the value of connection with other leaders and house churches.

If you would like to learn about The Living Room, a house church network we lead and are part of, please check out <https://living-church.com/the-living-room/>. Feel free to email us to learn more about The Living Room network.

## **Appendix E:** How Do You Start a House Church?

**The Quick Answer Is - You Don't.** You don't start a house church. You start with making new disciples of Jesus. House Church is just the result, product, or what forms from new disciples of Jesus being made. If this is the case, the better question might be - *"How Do New Disciples Become a House Church?"*

**First, Pray.** It starts with praying asking the Lord of the harvest to send you and others into the harvest (Matthew 9:35-38). So, pray. Pray a lot. Pray until God brings people to you or you to people ready to respond to the gospel of Jesus.

**Next, While Still Praying, Be an Everyday Missionary.** Realize that Jesus didn't only call you to be His disciple. He called you to be a "fisher of men," to turn you into something - a missionary (Matthew 4:18-20). Begin seeing yourself as a missionary. Begin living where you live like you would if you were a missionary in a different country. Build relationships with those who are not yet disciples of Jesus engaging in gospel and spiritual conversations with them. For ways to live like an everyday missionary look back over the Sharing Mission section under What Do House Churches Do?.

EMAIL FOR FREE RESOURCES: The Missionary Pathway, BLAB, Gospel Conversations

**Next, Begin a Bible Study With Those Who are Interested.** As you build relationships with those who are not yet disciples of Jesus, with those who seem to show interest in spiritual conversations, ask if they would be interested in learning about Jesus with you through a Bible study together. Begin studying one of the four gospels together, or work through a book like Christianity Explored or LIVE: Experience Christ's Life by Joel Comiskey.

EMAIL FOR FREE RESOURCES: The Missionary Pathway, The Teaching Funnel & How To Lead A Bible Study

**Next, Make New Disciples of Jesus (use 4 Practices of Discipleship Worksheet as a possible resource).** As you now study the Bible together, and those in the study begin learning and understanding about Jesus and the gospel, move from discussion to decision or response. At some point, as guided by the Holy Spirit, ask if anyone would like to respond to Jesus and give their life to Him accepting His invitation for forgiveness of sins which He provided by His death and resurrection. With those who do respond and desire to become followers of Jesus, you can begin working through the 4 Practices of Discipleship together.

EMAIL FOR FREE RESOURCE: 4 Practices of Discipleship Worksheet

**Move From Becoming a Bible Study to Becoming a House Church (use KC Underground's "Moving from Discovery Bible Study to Microchurch" as a possible resource).** In time, as this group of new disciples continue to grow and live out the practices of discipleship together as a new community, and live in obedience to Jesus, help them discover how living these practices together is being a church family much like the first disciples of Jesus we see in the first century.

*We highly encourage you to use the resource from KC Underground to help with this part of the process of becoming a house church.*

EMAIL FOR FREE RESOURCE: KC Underground's From Discovery Bible Study to Microchurch

**Pray, Seek, And Assign a Biblically Qualified Pastor to Shepherd this New Community of New Disciples.** As stated previously in this handbook, if this new community of new disciples is truly functioning like a church family, the pattern and practice we see in the New Testament is this new community needing a pastor/leader overseeing and shepherding them (1 Timothy 3:1-7, Titus 1:5). Identifying who the pastor is will take time, but we believe a biblically qualified pastor is necessary for this new community to function in a healthy way as a New Testament house church. If there isn't anyone within the group with the burden to oversee and shepherd, and with the character required for this role, then you wait and pray for God to raise up or bring a pastor-shepherd. (We encourage you to consider seeking wisdom from a house church network or other pastors as you seek to fill this role for this new community). Until God provides the pastor, continue living the practices of discipleship together. If and when someone is raised up or assigned as the pastor meeting the biblical qualifications, the community then can lay hands on them recognizing that person as the pastor-shepherd over this new community of new disciples. It is worth reminding of Paul's caution against laying hands too quickly on someone to lead God's people (1 Timothy 5:22).\*

EMAIL FOR FREE RESOURCE: Living Church Pastors Pipeline

*\*We have seen from our own experience in leading house churches and multiplying leaders how placing people too quickly into a pastoral leadership role who do not have a Spirit given burden to shepherd, and/or also lack the necessary proven character observed over time can nearly destroy new communities of God's people. It's better to wait than to place hands too soon on a leader who is not ready. We have experienced firsthand the reason for the Apostle Paul's warning (see 1 Timothy 5:22).*