

NINE CURRENT FORMS OF CHURCH FOUND WORLD-WIDE

Galen Currah, October 2007

1. **Traditional.** Mission-founded, these equate their forms with Christianity

With some notable exceptions, traditional churches tend to stagnate and decline, preserving denominational identities, upholding clerical privilege over an ageing membership. Those that would like to grow have mostly lost their young and prove unable to meet the needs of the current culture. Traditional churches remain costly to maintain, reproducing rarely and with difficulty, either by splits or hives, within their own community, sub-culture and economic class.

2. **Mega-churches.** These assemble audiences counted by thousands.

Founded by extraordinarily-gifted visionaries, these churches may grow at the expense of smaller churches by offering more and better ministry programmes. They require a staff of highly-talented experts coordinated by competent managers. Unless these churches foster small groups, their membership fails to maintain interpersonal relations and notable personal development. Mega-churches reproduce by identifying, sending and supporting the unusually gifted.

3. **Liturgical.** These historical churches endure over the centuries.

Various kinds of catholic and orthodox churches persist as the national or ethnic religion in ancient populations, and now serve immigrant communities in the West. Protestants, disgusted with shallow, superficial evangelicalism, have been converting into these churches that can offer them an experience of divine mystery along with an expressive and captivating liturgy. These churches reproduce mainly by sending designated, supported clerics who follow emigrants and slowly catechize others.

4. **Emerging.** These traditional structures cater to popular cultural traits.

These wonderfully innovative churches, found in post-Christian regions, composed of young, urban adults and of older adults seeking to prove relevant, understand the mentality, needs, hurts and cultural expressions of those called post-modern. Incapable of appreciating systematic theologies, these seekers after spirituality and new followers of Jesus, express themselves through contemporary arts and music within compassionate friendship circles. These churches reproduce mainly through intentional efforts of older believers freed from traditional restrictions.

5. **Cellular.** These little fellowships remain centrally-organized.

In societies that follow strong leaders, like parts of Africa, East Asia and Latin America, many Christian movements grow by continual evangelism within small gatherings that remain integral to a central "mother" church and "father" leader. Most seekers are evangelized and new believers disciplined with "cell" groups. In order to serve increasing numbers both materially and spiritually, an hierarchy of paid and volunteer leaders must be trained and supervised. These churches reproduce by hiving off cells under experienced leaders.

6. **Open.** These cells plan to meet at diverse times and venues.

Purposefully avoiding traditional forms of controlled worship, these communities specialize in improvised worship conducted in public places, seeking to appeal to non believers. Their messages, songs and prayers relate to the immediate audience of those who watch and listen to them. Workers are trained on the job and new believers are disciplined in homes and welcome centres.

7. **House.** These simple churches can reproduce fast and inexpensively.

Simply structured, unfinanced and lay-led, these little churches characterize most popular Christian movements historically and contemporarily. Meeting in homes and anywhere convenient, these churches reproduce as needed to accommodate folks coming to faith in Jesus through existing social networks. Group shepherds are coached in their work by more experienced leaders, often coordinated by a Titus (1:5) or a Timothy (2:2:2).

8. **Family.** These house churches consist of near relatives and friends.

Where members of an household come to faith at the same time, they may form a kind of house church. Growth proceeds into their extended family.

9. **Contextual.** These churches take the forms of a dominant religion.

New Christian believers from Hindu, Muslim, Buddhist and Animist backgrounds may opt to conserve their cultural worship and structural forms, filling these with new meanings as they trust and obey the Lord Jesus Christ. These churches are mostly found in countries, regions and communities where authorities remain hostile towards Christianity. Some decline to call themselves Christian, and they may be accused of synchronism, especially if they are still learning the New Testament. These churches mostly reproduce like house churches do, except where missionaries provide them with salaries and foreign education.