

Multiply House Churches in Your City

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Back when wooden-bodied streetcars clanged their way noisily along US city streets, public school events began with prayer and young adults flocked to neighborhood churches to form enjoyable relationships. Five wars later, most young adults view institutional churches as fossils, meaningless vestiges of a bygone age. In other countries, millions will not, or cannot, meet in church buildings, yet they eagerly participate in simple, loving house churches. Such churches are multiplying like rabbits in many places and thousands are following Jesus. It requires much less time and money to start a rabbit church that can reproduce easily in a church planting movement than it does to start a conventional church.

Our cities need thousands of house churches. These will not be started by proselytizing from existing churches, but in a movement born within, made up of, and led by the ‘post-moderns’ (or whatever they don’t call themselves now). The time is right; many are praying fervently for the salvation of the neglected generation. Gospel workers have to venture beyond the narrow confines of tradition. Several decades of helping house churches reproduce have brought me to believe that the following three activities can start the kind of house churches that will multiply through God’s power.

***Pray.** Intercede for the salvation and healing of friends and family members.*

- In many societies, including young adults in today’s America, most people who come to Christ do so not through preaching but through an encounter with Him, as Saul did on his way to Damascus. It may be through physical healing, a dream or some other work of Holy Spirit that points them to Jesus. God does these works, because believers ask Him to do so.
- Others discover the love that flows from God’s Spirit in the fellowship of a small, praying group. Individuals first meet Jesus in their spirit and later they learn what happened to them. For example, the apostles baptized new believers as soon as they repented, explaining later what it was all about, as Paul did in Romans 6.
- Older Americans often assume that faith must grow out of learning basic biblical doctrines first, often from a preacher. However, the risen, ascended Christ comes among those who call on him, making His presence felt. However, he sometimes does so both through the written Word and just as often through answered prayer, the Holy Spirit’s conviction, the love and compassion of converted family members or friends, getting baptised, taking Communion, and even visions, signs and wonders.

***Obey.** Obey Jesus above and before all else, avoiding man-made rules and traditions.*

- Gather as a family or a group of two or more friends and start simply by doing the things that Jesus told us to do. Meet anywhere—in houses, jails, coffee shops, parks....
- Show believers and seekers how to obey Jesus’ commands out of love for Him (Matt. 28:18-20; John 14:15). At first, summarize His commands in seven basic ones, as illustrated in Acts 2:37-47. There, 3,000 new

believers of the first church obeyed these seven liberating commands as they met in homes in Jerusalem. Ed Aw's *House Church Planting Quick Guide* explains these foundational orders of Christ; it is referenced at the end of this article. Briefly, Christ's basic commands are 1) Repent, believe and receive the Holy Spirit, 2) Be baptized, 3) Celebrate Communion, 4) Show love by serving the needy, forgiving others, and praising God, 5) Pray, 6) Give, and 7) Teach disciples to obey Jesus.

- Believers also obey Jesus when they observe His apostles' commands, because they wrote with His authority upon the foundation of his commands. The apostles' instructions apply Jesus' commands to believers who are already baptized and under their shepherds' care. Once a church is obeying Jesus' commands, begin teaching the members the other vital duties and doctrines of the New Testament.

Grow. Develop four skills needed in 'rabbit churches'.

Skill #1: **Lead small group worship**

- **Speak to one another to strengthen, encourage and console** (one Cor. 14:3). This is the purpose of prophecy in the New Testament, and *all* believers can prophesy (one Corinthians 14:3, 24-25). Powerful conviction of sin and awareness of the presence of God often come to seekers in a small gathering. Over 60 New Testament "one another" commands require that believers teach one another, exhort one another, correct one another, confess faults one to another, and much more.
- **Celebrate Communion.** Sometimes introduce the Lord's Supper not only with Paul's guidelines in 1 Corinthians 11, and other times with other related Bible passages such as the Passover in Exodus, Jesus' Last Supper, and His counsel in John 6 to eat His flesh and drink His blood to have eternal life.
- **Prepare children ahead of time to take an active part.** Let them briefly act out Bible stories together with adults or in some other way participate in worship. Let older children disciple and train younger ones.
- **Plan the week's activities.** Visit the needy, seekers, prisoners, widows and those needing counsel.
- **Keep gatherings active and interactive.** Let folks sit in a circle, pray for one another, laugh, confess faults, shed tears, tell or act out a Bible story with the help of children. Let children ask adults questions about what they learned and how they will put it into practice in the following days. Let leaders mentor newer ones, plan to start daughter churches, break bread. Let grace flow freely and avoiding imposing man-made restrictions.

Skill #2: **Evangelise through networks**

- Immediately help new believers and seekers to communicate with their family and friends about Jesus. Work mainly within their social network.
- Keep looking for the 'sons of peace', those whom God has prepared and who will receive you and introduce you to their family and friends.
- Avoid philosophical and doctrinal approaches to evangelism. Simply tell your testimony and make sure others learn how Jesus died for their sins, rose again to give them life, ascended into heaven, and is present now among believers through God's Holy Spirit.
- Follow up repentance with baptism without needless delay. If you delay it because you doubt folks' faith, such

doubt is contagious and you will lose most of the seekers. If you receive them and their family members into the body of Christ by baptism as soon as is reasonably possible, trusting God to complete His work, then your faith will be contagious and will be able to follow up most if not all of the seekers.

- When a family or network of friends receives Christ, let them become the nucleus of a new church. Do not take them into an existing one. Always try first to form another flock, for every new believer opens a new vein of gold among his family and acquaintances.

Skill #3: **Train new leaders in the way Jesus and Paul did**

- Let those who led the seekers to Christ—or co-workers from the same ‘mother’ church—mentor new leaders in new churches. Help them to start shepherding their own families or circles of friends, doing what the Bible requires of every family head.
- To mentor new leaders, find out what is still lacking in their flocks, help them to plan to introduce what they or their flocks need now, and provide something to study that will help them do so. Use training materials written for new rabbit church leaders. See sample free materials at www.Paul-Timothy.net.

Skill #4: **Mobilizing Members to Start Daughter Churches**

- ‘Lay hands’ on church members to empower them to start new churches and to mentor their leaders.
- Aim to form a cluster of closely-knit churches, not one isolated rabbit. One small church seldom has members with all of the spiritual gifts needed to do the ministries that the New Testament requires, and so it will become ingrown and defensive. Thus, rabbit churches must cooperate in loving harmony with other rabbits nearby, serving collectively as the Body of Christ.
- The biblical word ‘church’ meant not only the universal Body of Christ and local flocks, but also the cluster of churches in a region. No church buildings appeared in history until nearly three centuries after Christ. The ‘church’ in Ephesus, like the one in Jerusalem, was a network of tiny flocks.
- Let the churches of an area gather occasionally to celebrate, report what God is doing, and plan projects in which all the flocks participate. Limit such inter-church body life to an area no larger than what allows all of the believers to gather occasionally for fellowship. It should not be political and it normally requires no constitutions, by-laws, budget or even elected officials.

Resources

Download Ed Aw’s instruction sheet that folds into a pocketsize booklet, a successful tool for reproducing house churches: <<http://acquirewisdom.com/house-church-planting-quick-guide>>.

Reproducible Pastoral Training: Practical guidelines to mentor and multiply churches, Patrick O’Connor.

<<http://missionbooks.org/wcl/customer/product.php?productid=533&cat=1&page=1>>.

Mentoring tools and sites: <<http://www.MentorAndMultiply.com>>.

Free, reproducible training materials for new leaders & missionaries: <<http://www.Paul-Timothy.net>>.

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