

HOUSE CHURCH

a simple way to revolutionize your church

Mark Darling

Over these many years of pastoring, leading and planting churches, I have labored and prayed for wisdom—seeking to discover the right combination of ingredients needed to create the kind of church that could produce what I believe the Scripture calls us to. I believe that after a long and arduous journey, I have discovered what I was searching for. This booklet is an attempt to describe it to you.

a REVOLUTIONARY CHURCH MODEL

The great challenge of our time is: how do we develop and reproduce a genuine, New Testament environment in modern American churches—churches that produce radical, godly, New Testament Christianity?

Honestly, the data is quite alarming. The evangelical Christian church today, by in large, is seldom producing New Testament disciples. It has often been replaced by a consumer-driven, shopping mall approach that is seldom intimate, life transforming or truly effective at reproducing soul-winning, Christ-honoring, obedient disciples, whose lifestyles and choices reflect a biblical worldview and a New Testament pattern and lifestyle.

We must in humility face these facts and this present reality. Clearly the goal we must strive to achieve is building churches that produce disciples of Christ who are committed to living out the teachings of the word of God—especially the New Testament. We must strive to build churches that are developing and reproducing pastors who can teach, lead, and model New Testament Christianity; and Christians who are genuinely committed to the great commission as a way of life. We must develop Christians in the local

church who unite with each other, who passionately and devotedly love one another, who are teamed up together to share the Gospel with the lost, and who are committed to serve one another and the world around them.

How can this be achieved in this crazy, busy, American life that most people are caught up in? The solution: "reinvent" church through a New Testament model. In other words, "go back to the future."

Looking at the New Testament, we see clearly that there were large, public gatherings for preaching and teaching and there were smaller gatherings called "the church in Aquilla's house," that met for teaching, prayer, the Lord's Supper, fellowship, and meals, etc. In other words, "House Church."

Hand-in-hand, this makes for a terrific church model in which disciples can be trained and developed, intimacy can be achieved, pastoral leaders can be reproduced, intergenerational relationships can occur, families can experience church together, and tremendous management of the church is possible by spreading the load around and helping to ensure that the full-time pastoral team does not get run ragged. Instead, they thrive in an environment where other men are being trained and developed to join them in doing the work of shepherding, teaching, and disciple-making.

THE GAME PLAN

House church leaders do not need the tremendous gifting and charisma that mega church or large church pastors need. They can be ordinary men who love Christ, who have a heart and desire to grow into elders, who are pursuing Christ-like character, and who are willing and eager to lay their lives down for God's people.

CHURCH STRUCTURE

House church leaders work in teams of two with approximately 40-50 people in each house church. House churches meet twice a month for worship, communion, teaching and prayer and then twice a month in even smaller groups of 10-20 called "small group." Small groups are led by a different set of leaders/facilitators that assist the team of house church leaders and whom the house church leaders oversee. Then the whole church meets together publicly once a week for worship and teaching usually done by the fulltime pastoral team, i.e. the large church meeting.

The lead pastors work vicariously through the house church "pastors-in-training." They develop together a plan for teaching the church through a series of biblical topics each year or go through books of the Bible. Through

these house churches, mini-retreats, outreach projects, mission trips, baptisms, compassion projects, prayer overnights, and social events can all be planned and executed at the house church level.

The pastor is greatly multiplying his efforts, his life and his time. Two house church pastors-in-training can completely handle their house church while working full-time jobs, thereby solving the constant money problem of hiring more pastors. They become tentmakers!

This strategy allows you to multiply worship musicians and singers and gives more people a chance to use their gifts and talents.

The intimacy experienced within house church is at a level seldom seen in normal church structure. The house church structure ensures that the groups are shepherded well, whereas small groups alone are often just facilitated—and seldom go as deep or as far as they could. But when small group involvement is coupled with house church and the large public meeting you have a tremendous combination. It is a win, win, win! It solves so many problems with church today.

I believe this church model may be the most significant thing you can do to demonstrate and imprint New Testament Christianity in the lives of your people. I believe this model will awaken men to aspire to leadership like no other and imprint great commission values and lifestyles on the hearts of your disciples. May God give us the grace to be revolutionary.

ADVANTAGES WITH THIS REVOLUTIONARY MODEL:

- Tremendous plurality of leadership
- Gives the men you are training real world, real-time pastoral and teaching experience
- Clearly reminds people often that the church is them, not the building
- Greatly connects the church
- Develops more teachers of the word
- Greater shepherding and discipleship for the church
- Easy to do and easy to replicate
- Allows the church to grow and grow and grow
- Allows you to organize the believers geographically and relationally in your city
- Builds great momentum
- Really engages men!

- Allows you to include kids in the mix through careful planning, allowing kids to experience church with mom and dad and spiritual aunts and uncles
- Couples feel greater positive pressure to train and manage their children because of the need to sit quietly for the teaching and be well-mannered around all the adults
- Allows singles to experience the beauty of family, motherhood and children
- Creates an intimate praise and worship experience and communion experience
- Inspires folks to use their homes for Christ
- Inspires more men to aspire to pastoral leadership— a role they can see, understand, and one that is genuinely attainable
- Really connects people in an otherwise cold, brutal, abusive, disconnected world
- Maximizes your leadership through the multiple layers of small group leaders and house church leaders working together
- Incredibly economical
- Tremendous flexibility to train and teach through all kinds of biblical subjects

- Excites and unites a church in ways seldom seen before
- Makes the leaders and believers feel tremendous ownership of the church
- Awakens initiatives and creativity
- Creates a deeper level of camaraderie and spiritual accountability
- Helps avoid the “celebrity pastor” syndrome
- Prepares the church for church planting
- Teaches leaders to problem solve

SPECIFIC RESPONSIBILITIES OF HOUSE CHURCH LEADERS:

1. To be a role model and example of Christ-like living and a great commission lifestyle and family
2. To help shepherd and disciple the people in their house church
3. To prepare and teach on one 20-25 minute message per month
4. To attend two house church leaders training meetings per month with the full time pastor/ mentor, each lasting approximately 2 ½ hours. These will be for prayer, equipping, training and interacting on the state of the church, house church, etc.
5. To meet with small group leaders in their house church once per month for a meal and to coach and pray and encourage them

6. To plan two prayer overnights per year held in one of the house church leaders homes, inviting their small group leaders, apprentices, and worship team, usually around 10-15 people
7. To plan and execute one mission trip per year! They will of course use delegation and rely on key individuals in the house church to help them plan and execute the trip
8. To plan one evangelism outreach per year (Many of our house churches use the same outreach project multiple times during the year. We encourage this whenever possible.)
9. To plan one compassion project per year aimed at helping those in need (These are often also used multiple times during the year.)
10. To promote and attend Faithwalkers each year
11. To participate in the GCLI Regional meetings, two per year
12. Whenever possible, to attend the Pastors Conference (Note: as much as possible I encourage each local church to pay for their house church leaders to attend this conference and to pay for each house church leader and his wife and kids to attend Faithwalkers as these men are performing an invaluable service to your church)

SAMPLE CHURCH CALENDAR

SUNDAY	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY
1 6:00 PM Small Group	2	3 7:00-9:30 PM All House Church leaders meet together with pastor	4	5	6 7:30 PM The Rock Service	7
8 6:00 PM House Church	9	10	11	12	13 7:30 PM The Rock Service	14
15 6:00 PM Small Group	16	17 7:00 PM House Church Leaders meet with their Small Group leaders and Apprentices	18	19	20 7:30 PM The Rock Service	21 7:00-9:30 AM All House Church leaders meet together with pastor
22 6:00 PM House Church	23	24	25	26	27 7:30 PM The Rock Service	28
29 Fifth Sunday, no meetings!	30	31				

- No Small Group during the months of June, July & August.
- No House Church during the month of July.
- Small Groups meet 1st & 3rd Sunday at 6:00 PM; House Churches meet 2nd & 4th Sunday at 6:00 PM.
- Pastor trains and meets with House Church leaders 1st Tuesday, 7:00-9:30 PM and 3rd Saturday, 7:00-9:30 AM.
- House Church leaders meet with their Small Group leaders and apprentices 3rd Tuesday at 7:00 PM.

DESCRIPTION OF A TYPICAL HOUSE CHURCH MEETING

Begins at 6:00 PM Sunday evenings and last for 1 hour and 30 minutes to 1 hour and 40 minutes (Note: Starts at 6:00 PM as this works best for families with kids and college students, and avoids all rush hour traffic.)

House church consists of five simple components: a time of worship with acoustic instruments, the Lord's Supper, teaching, breakout prayer, and an occasional breakout discussion of the teaching topic. Note: usually five minutes or less taking for announcements.

The night looks likes this:

10 min	6-6:10	Fellowship/people talking
20 min	6:10-6:30	Worship/singing
10 min	6:30-6:40	The Lord's Supper
20 min	6:40-7:00	House church leader teaches
30 min	7:00-7:30	Breakout prayer and discussion of the message

(Note: Sometimes the order of teaching and breakout prayer is reversed. Every third house church we also do a pot luck meal to help create greater intimacy and a family environment.)

WHAT ABOUT KIDS?

One important aspect of house church is the inclusion of children. It's what helps create the family environment to house church and is intended to allow a family to experience this church (i.e. fellowship, prayer, worship, Lord's supper, and teaching together). It also helps raise the bar of what is expected behaviorally in kids and acts as a positive stimulus for parents to train their children to be more attentive, well mannered, and well behaved.

At each house church we do provide a room where mothers can go to nurse their babies and where (especially during the teaching portion of the meeting) a mother may take a child who is especially noisy, distracting, or unruly. We often use a baby monitor system to allow the moms in that room to hear the message if they want. The primary goal, though, remains the same; to keep everyone together as much as possible in order to experience intergenerational house church together.

ACTUAL COMMENTS FROM HOUSE CHURCH MEMBERS

I love house church because it is visual and physical evidence of The Rock's commitment to growing leaders from within the church.

The tight network within the house church grows the greater sense of community that exudes the love of Christ. That is irresistible!

When we hear a message in a close personal setting, I feel like I'm sharing the best thing in my life with the best people in my life.

House church is giving men some wonderful opportunities to lead, serve, counsel, and get some great experience loving and shepherding the people of our church. I love the intimacy of fellowship in a home setting.

I love my house church because of the worship! With just the guitars and everyone's voices, it's so simple and you can actually hear everyone's voices. It's beautiful!

I love that everyone has to set-up and really help house church happen. It makes us feel that we are really a part of things.

I love my house church because of the community. It is amazing to be able to mix with college students, married couples, and kids—and to all be able to worship, laugh, learn, and talk together. House church really has become a family to me.

Our two house church leaders have done a great job with their messages. They are very relevant. I am able to take something home from each message.

House church is very genuine. It is about gathering one or more believers in a place to worship and fellowship together. House church does not take place in a formal church. If anything, it stresses that WE (the people) are the church.

I love my house church because when I am sick and my family is in need, EVERYONE tries to help in any way they can. And everyone has a genuine concern for us.

We have opportunities to worship, pray, break bread, and serve together through outreach and mission trips. There is a deeper sense of accountability and camaraderie. The commitment and involvement has increased. The topics and messages are meaningful and insightful.

I feel like we are being more engaged in each others lives. I feel like we are progressing more than we ever were before. It has given our entire church the ability to raise up more leaders. I love house church simply because God's will is being done here.

I love how we pull together during hard times—prayer and fasting. I enjoy the communion every time remembering what Christ did for us.

I appreciate the authenticity, intimacy, and accountability generated by a small group of Christians united behind the cause of growing deeper in Christ. I am fortunate to have the opportunity to learn from men who are making the very real sacrifices necessary to be a leader in Christ.

I like the accountability—we see who is committed. It causes us as members to grow and take on more responsibility. I feel more connected to The Rock and its mission.

It feels like it has brought the New Testament church model front and center in my life. Now I just need to continue to let God work.

House church is an awesome experience for our young kids. I love the honest and raw teachings from our peers. It helps foster intimacy.

A NOTE FROM MARK

If your church is interested in exploring this option or in doing church in this way, I would love to be of service. Please don't hesitate to call or write me at mark@rockthechurch.com. There are some strategic leadership principles that are important in order to implement this successfully that I have not included in this booklet. I would like the opportunity to explain those to you personally before you begin this style of church.

Humbly at your service,

Mark Darling