

Organic Pastor in Simple Church

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In 2006 I was working at a local hospital as a chaplain and taken back by a high number of patients who could express and articulate their personal belief in Jesus Christ and convictions in biblical doctrines, yet who also were not involved and fellowship in any church congregation.

Many of these same individuals also shared stories with me of their experiences with area churches that told of similar accounts of not being able to connect with the members or of finding the traditional church format inauthentic to them, mainly citing the pulpit to pew lecture dissemination as an impediment to connecting with the message, while nearly all had praises for either a past small group or Sunday school class experience.

After hearing these accounts over and over, year after year, I began to be burdened by a mission to reach these individuals and others who aren't being served by the traditional church formats. My thinking was that these believers didn't realize how much they needed the fellowship of like-minded Christians and what blessings of spiritual growth they are missing-out on by being journeying alone.

Admittedly, I could also empathize with these people because when I was sitting in the pews of an otherwise great church ministry, it was hard for me to feel connected through the program. Despite a godly biblical pastor, beautiful church choir, and friendly people - there was still a disconnect. It seemed to me that modern church services had the similar problem as modern school classrooms in that they dish-out a one-size fits all program yet ignore the fact that not everyone learns through the same listen and leave method.

A Simpler Way

It was during this time that I learned about a fellow Southern Baptist minister who was on a North American Mission Board missionary team and successfully reaching unchurched people in Arizona through small group gatherings that he called "tactical churches." He came to similar conclusions that I did, and he was serving as a pastor of small group gatherings that served as the attendees only weekly primary spiritual worship experience.

Now my background was in denominational church planting through the traditional route of a sending model that seeks launching big, aiming to growing big, and feeding the budget in hopes of staying big. In the 1990's I had planted two churches that continue to thrive in their denominational system, and in the late 1980's I had re-planted a church that the denominational sent me to as a last ditch effort, which God blessed and revived.

However, after some research, prayer, and conversations about small church communities that were non-conventional and meeting in homes, in the workplace, in coffee houses, and even in small leased retail spaces, I was becoming convicted of stepping out in faith to plant such a nontraditional church.

I was sensing God leading me to plant a simpler, smaller, zero budget, faith based gathering approach that would genuinely rely on the promise of **Zechariah 4:6**, not a budget or denominational support.

So, I set the date of January 6, 2011 as a step of faith in verifying the will of God for the Kingdom of God in Mobile, Alabama through a nontraditional fellowship launch. With no advertising or budget, but plenty of prayer, I began sharing with friends and on my social media the start date and the mission.

We launched in a Ryan's Restaurant where we could use a community conference room for free as long as we bought their breakfast buffet. After we got tired of eating their breakfast every Sunday, we decided to move to my home and in about a year's time we leased our a 1000 square foot retail space, and have since moved into a retail space closer to 2000 square feet and each week we enjoy 12 to 20 people in fellowship.

Before you think, That's all? Just 12 to 20 people? Let me remind you that Jesus Christ would have come to earth to 1, That's all? Yes, 1. And don't forget, Jesus had a church of 12. And if that doesn't warm you to idea of investing in a few sheep rather that a crowd, let me remind you that the membership roles of today's American church are not the same as the rolls in Heaven.

When I get to Heaven, I think those 12 to 20 souls are going to be very grateful that we didn't abandon our calling to simple church ministry because the worth of the numbers representing the attendees was more valuable than the attendees themselves.

An Organic Pastor

Over the years I have often wondered how many pastors and ministers could still be experiencing the joy of their pastoral calling if they could at least consider simple church ministry.

My ministry with **CrossHope Chapel**, our simple church fellowship, has been the most rewarding, least stressful, and the most authentic of any ministerial assignment I have been part of.

I realize that a pastor in this type of organic pastoral ministry would have to not be dependent on earning a salary from his simple church ministry and he would have to not need the recognition of his peers.

The pastoral calling in simple church or micro church or house church or organic church (whatever you wish to call it) is a more natural focus on prayer and the ministry of the word, rather than employment cares such as walking a line of non-offense to parishioners, congregational leaders, or supervisors.

It's being a shepherd and a teacher more than an organizational leader and chief executive decision maker.

It is providing pastoral care within the context of organic, simple, or house church ministry, and exercising that through an organic way, not by the dictates of denominational or organizational training.

Simple Church Communities

The pastor of simple church community is more concerned about facilitating a discipleship group rather than building a big crowd or overseeing attractive programs for outreach.

A simple church community is a regular held gathering of people for the expressed purpose of worship, Bible teaching, and pastoral care that consists of two or more according to the promise of **Matthew 18:20**.

Simple church communities offer fellowship that has a more natural, simple, and informal process of being in a community where the pastor is a shepherd (not an executive) and the gathering is relational (not religious).

Planting a simple church community, in my opinion, is when God calls a man to pastoral care and leadership of the formation of any gathering of people for the expressed purpose of worship, Bible teaching, and pastoral care that is regular and serves as the primary Christian fellowship for its attendees.

The opposite of a simple church planting, in my opinion, would be a gathering of people who's coming together has been orchestrated by a larger entity as part of a replication plan. This would be more of what we use to call a mother-daughter church planting process or denomination-church planter process. There is certainly nothing wrong or no reason to criticize the more traditional process of replicated, but it does have its limits.

Simple church planting is dependent more on the Holy Spirit than on a denomination or a sending church. When I sensed the Lord calling me to start what became **CrossHope Chapel** I did not have a salary, funds for a building, or people sent from neighboring congregations to help form a nucleus of the new church plant membership. I only had a calling in my heart and the promises of God.

At the time I was working as a hospital chaplain and the pastoral calling in my life was beginning to burden me to plant a church fellowship that was less traditional than the previous church plants I was involved with.

I had a vision of a more authentic, relational, and informal gathering that was centered more on discipleship than programming or productions. I was burdened with a vision of church planting that was truly based on the promise of **Zechariah 4:6** *"Not by might, nor by power, but by my spirit, saith the Lord of hosts."* It was a vision that relied on the Spirit of God, not a provided salary or budget or a waiting membership but evidence of God's leading as a naturally developed church plant that would look like whatever God wants it to look like with whoever God sends to it.

At some point, after months of prayer, I made a commitment to begin a new church plant. I picked a start date about 8 months out and began sharing that with people I knew and on my social media accounts. It was a zero-budget endeavor that started out at a Ryan's Restaurant, moved to my home, then 1 year later we leased our own public place.

To me, a simple church community is not defined by where it meets or how many people attend but by its approach to gathering and doing church together. I believe it has a lot to do with a biblical approach to being in community with as a shepherd and sheep.

I am of the opinion that if God calls an individual to the pastoral gift of caring and teaching, they can answer that call without a dependence on being hired or given a salary first. If God calls you, He will equip you and empower you to use that calling for the Kingdom of God. Consider the promise of **Matthew 18:20** where Jesus says, *"For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them."*

Pastoral Care

If you research house church or simple church or organic church. It won't take you long before you come across anti-clergy rhetoric. Our simple church has always had a website, and while we were still meeting in my home, someone came across our website and wrote me a very lengthy email explaining that we can not be a true a house church because there can be no pastor involved in a house church.

I think it is worth pausing to refresh our understanding of the biblical basis for why God gave the gift of pastors to the church. I realize that there are plenty of pastors out there who have abused the office but that is not a license for a simple church fellowship to reject God's gift of true pastoral ministry.

Most simple church gatherings function with their own adapted dynamics, and that is fine, but here, I want to layout seven biblical considerations when it comes to decisions regarding the implementation or function of pastoral leadership in your organic, simple, or house church ministry.

1) In **Ephesians 4:11** we see that pastors are given to the church as a gift of God, for the edifying sake of the body of Christ. If you have known some bad apples who wear the title of "pastor" don't categorize all those in that calling as bad apples. Also, your organic, simple, or house church is still a church to whom God has given this gift.

2) In **1 Peter 5:1-2** we see that pastors are to have oversight over the affairs of the church, and that would include the local body of believers. They are to be shepherds of the flock, and an organic, simple, or house church ministry is an ideal setting for a man called of God to be a biblical shepherd, rather than a religious organization executive.

3) In **Ephesians 4:11-12** we see that pastors are called to equip the saints, those in the church, and they are not called to focus on those outside of the church. John MacArthur has written *"Pastors are not called to the culture, and we're not called to the unconverted. We have been mandated to feed our flocks so they can grow spiritually. We're called to serve the redeemed people of God as an agent of sanctification and protection. The measure of a man's effectiveness in ministry is not the number of people in his congregation every week—it's the Christlikeness of his congregation."*

4) In **Acts 6:4** we see the Apostles devoted themselves to prayer and the teaching of the word of God. For a man called of God to be the gift of "pastor and teacher" within the context of organic, simple, or house church is a great fulfillment of this principle, because there is no or nearly no care of budget or denominational protocol.

5) In **Matthew 16:18** we see that Christ has promised to have in this world a church that He is building, and it will not be destroyed or destructed by Satan and His evil schemes. If you think the institutional church is the enemy, you have given your thoughts over to the enemy. Most of us who advocate for organic, simple, or house church do so because of its methods and the institutional church is simply a method, like or it not, but don't help Satan move his gates against the church by complaining against her. The church is the bride of Christ, and no groom will sit ideally by while their bride is being ridiculed.

6) In **2 Timothy 4:2** we see that preaching is God's ordained means of presenting His word to His church. Preaching may be more of a conversational teaching style, as it is with me at **CrossHope Chapel** but however you spin it, there ought to be formal preaching in the gathering of the saints, even in your organic, simple, or house church.

7) In **1 Corinthians 1:26** and **Romans 11:29** we see that God has given us a calling to ministry on behalf of the church. There is both a corporate calling and an individual calling but one thing is for sure, God has not recanted His plan to call men to pastoral ministry for the encouragement of His saints. I realize that some in organic church life decry anything that appears to them to be hierarchical in organizational structure, but that is God's design.

God does call individual men to rise up and live out the calling He has laid on them. God did not call the nation of Israel to get up and leave Egypt, God called Moses to get up and equip the nation of Israel to get up and leave Egypt. Throughout the narratives of the Bible we have that same repeated story line of God calling men to call mankind.

While the pastor in an organic, simple, or house church ministry context may be more chaplain-like than mega-church executive-like, I believe it is a ministry given by God to His church.

Starting a Simple Church

Let's talk about starting simple church ministry. You don't have to have a seminary degree to answer God's call to pastoral care through a simple church ministry, but you do need to start with a call upon your heart.

God uses pastors – those with a pastoral calling on their lives according to the Spirit of God and not necessarily according to the credentialing committee of a church organization – in His ministry and simple churches that are led by pastoral care leaders are certainly following the biblical example that best feeds God's flock.

I suggest starting by forming the foundations of the simple church communities' beliefs, mission, and values of what your house church will be and look like. Too many simple church formations in America are led by disgruntled church members who only want to start something different than what they've left – start something that God has defined in your heart so clarify that on paper.

Another reason you want to form some definition and identity for your simple church before it begins to gather, is because some simple church gatherings avoid organization and end up as an all-day anything-goes event led by everyone's whims and weirdness.

As you begin to meet, don't do simple church on a smaller scale or in a smaller way than you did at the corner Baptist church that you were a member of. A simple church is not defined by its program, liturgy, attendance, size or location, but by its basic biblical format and purpose which allows for variables within each individual house church fellowship. It's simple, with the basic **Acts 2:42** format of Bible teaching, prayer, song, and food.

Remember, the purpose of starting a simple church is to provide a regular gathering that serves as the primary spiritual community for two or more people (**Matthew 18:20**) for the purpose to *"grow in grace and the knowledge of our Lord"* (**2 Peter 3:18**).

I realize that if you are moving forward with God's call upon your heart to start a simple church, you have more questions. If you do, I am more than happy to talk with you about those questions and share any information I can that has worked for us or for others.

Please visit my **Pastoral Blog** site at www.stevedurkac.org where you will find a category that I post in for **Simple Church** that you may find helpful, too.