

THE MICRO-CHURCH REVOLUTION!

By Rick Vincent

CHAPTER 1

Christianity Today

“Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour.” (1 Peter 5:8 KJV)

War on Christianity

Today’s Christians are living in extremely turbulent times. Whether believers realize it or not, the Body of Christ is at war. Followers around the world continue to be slaughtered for their faith in Christ. Governments have been focused on eroding the religious rights of Christians for nearly 2,000 years.

Atheists, hell-bent on destroying the Church, are working from within the power structure to discredit Christianity. Funded by wealthy modern-day devils, the enemy is making tremendous inroads into the Christian life. Most believers are ill-equipped for the warfare that is taking place all around them.

Ungodliness rules our society. Evil is prevalent everywhere one looks. Television and movies continue to astound Christian viewers with immoral content. Godless influential people are brainwashing young adults into accepting all of the degeneracy being promoted by special interest groups. Even some churches have strayed so far from God’s Word that they could be considered cults.

Society is collapsing around us. Neighborhoods are crumbling with increasing crime, homelessness, and corruption. Morality has fallen so far that it is hard to believe the course can be reversed. This decline cannot continue to manifest without a profound effect on the Body of Christ.

The scene is set for a disaster of biblical proportions, leaving some to wonder if these are the end times. Power shifts around the world create an environment of uncertainty and fear. Radical Islam has generated utter chaos as nations react to diabolical terrorist acts. Mentally unstable, homemade terrorists continue to vent their rage on innocent victims.

Christian symbols are being attacked and removed from public spaces. Separation of Church and State is becoming separation of Church from country. This is enough to alarm even the most ardent followers of Christ who are truly walking in faith and trusting in His protection.

Struggles Within

The American Church has seen better times. Nearly 75% of the population claim to be Christian, yet only 25% of these believers practice their faith on a regular basis. Many of these practitioners actually do not even attend church.

The large percentage of the nation’s Christians practicing their faith outside of the traditional church are disconnected from the Body of Christ. These followers may simply pray and read the Bible at home. Many attend Bible studies with other disengaged Christians. Some help others by volunteering with non-profit organizations.

Followers are leaving traditional churches in alarming numbers. It is predicted that by 2025 traditional church membership will be cut in half. It will become much harder for the Church to recover from this downturn as attendance plummets. The United States will become a post-Christian nation if this decline continues to accelerate.

One reason for this deterioration is that millennials are not engaging with the Church as previous generations have. Many traditional churches do not offer what the younger generation is looking for. The worship experience lacks the dynamic environment that today's young adults have in other areas of their life.

Church membership is aging without the participation of this vital age group. Only 15% of young Christians are attending church regularly. The longer this trend continues, the more alienated young adults will become, and the less relevant the Church will be.

A new and exciting church experience is needed to inspire millennials and Christians of all ages to reengage with the Body of Christ. Church participation will continue to decline without a catalyst to turn the momentum around. The micro-church is uniquely positioned to fill this need and to lead believers back into the fold.

State of the Church

The majority of Christian churches in the United States are in a state of stagnation or decline. Growth is being seen in small and very large churches, but the vast majority of churches are in trouble. Only 15% of traditional churches are considered to be in good or excellent financial health. Over 4,000 churches close their doors each year, and only 1,000 are launched to fill the gap.

More than 335,000 Christian churches dot the landscape of the United States. Congregation sizes range from under 100 to over 40,000 persons. Worldwide there are 37 million churches, over 2 billion Christians, and 34,000 denominations. This landscape does not make it easy to present the united front that will be needed to turn the tide on church decline.

The commitment of time and money to support a traditional church typically rests with only 20-25% of the congregation. These key contributors are becoming disenchanted and burning out because of the demands being placed on them. Volunteers are getting harder to recruit. Church culture is changing faster than ever before.

To make things worse, many church teachings and doctrines are not based on the Word of God. Some have twisted what the Bible says to back up their misguided beliefs. Churches are using invalid Old Testament legalism and a performance-based mentality to stifle members. It is very easy to see how churches can stray from the Word of God and how church members can lose faith in the leadership.

Millions of Christians do not attend church on a regular basis. Some are "CEOs" who show up on Christmas and Easter only. Others have given up on the Church altogether. Who are these sidelined Christians?

Some are church volunteers who gave years of service to the Church only to be discarded because of politics or personalities. Most of these disenchanted members are torn about leaving the Church. They are embedded in a community that they truly love. Some avoid leaving for years until so much damage is done that they are forced to cut ties. This frustrating experience often results in members vowing never to return to the Church.

Many Christians have fallen away from the Church as a result of life's circumstances. Some have not attended services since childhood. Others have committed themselves to Christ but never followed up with their walk of faith with Him. The further down the road they get, the less likely it is that reengagement will occur.

Getting sidelined Christians into the battle will be a challenge. The Body of Christ must take action to get the Church moving forward again. Every follower needs to discover the purpose for which God created them and get about their anointed duties.

Moving Forward

Immediate changes need to be made in traditional churches to stem the flow of refugees. A reengineering of this valid church model will help to compel dissatisfied Christians to stay and commit. The micro-church will act as a mechanism to keep committed Christians engaged as traditional churches inevitably reinvent themselves.

Reengaging sidelined Christians is essential to the survival of our Christian nation. God's Word and a revitalized Church will provide the ammunition needed to fight the war being waged against Christianity. All Christians need to be a part of the great revolution and revival ahead.

One cannot help but believe that God is not pleased with the current state of the Church. Yet His love continues to be poured out on those who believe. His blessings are as real today as they were over 6,000 years ago.

Get off the sidelines and back in the battle. Jesus gives us the same invitation today that He gave to His disciples, "Follow Me." Act on this request now without hesitation.

"These things I have spoken unto you, that in me ye might have peace. In the world ye shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world." (John 16:33 KJV)

CHAPTER 2

The Micro-Church

*“For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them.”
(Matthew 18:20 KJV)*

New Testament Church

The original Church was formed nearly 2,000 years ago as Christians gathered in homes to hear the amazing news about Christ’s resurrection. The disciples moved from home to home teaching believers and converting unbelievers. The Holy Spirit which came upon them at Pentecost allowed the disciples to perform signs and wonders. These miracles drew crowds and brought thousands to Christ.

Many of these micro-churches during this period operated under the radar to avoid detection by the Roman Empire. Considering the time period, the small church model was extremely effective at spreading the Gospel. This unique forum was used exclusively up until the 4th century A.D. when formal churches started to be erected.

The micro-church has been known by many names since the original churches were formed. The list includes house church, small church, simple church, and organic church. These titles all describe a similar small church model, which has existed in one form or another since Christianity began. This simple format remains a remarkably viable church structure that is growing in popularity around the world.

21st Century Landscape

The modern house church movement that started in the 1960s has morphed into an eclectic mix of church formats. Groups have developed hundreds of models using the house church moniker to carry out God’s plan to unite and expand the Body of Christ. Many of these formats would be considered true micro-churches, while some would be better classified as cell churches or planting movements.

No matter what the model or motivation, it is clear that God is moving in this arena and making huge inroads into Satan’s well-established kingdom here on earth. Church planting movements that are a part of the micro-church scene in China and other nations are seeking to lead as many people as possible to Christ. These movements are making a tremendous difference in the countries in which they operate. However, they are a far cry from a 12-member micro-church in San Diego, California, that has an assorted network of partners that support a mission serving homeless veterans.

Micro-churches are so diversified today that it is hard to explain exactly what one is, let alone how to start one. This book presents a missional model that seems appropriate to fit the micro-church environment in the United States and other Western nations. The model works extremely well for unchurched Christians who are seeking to reconnect with the Body of Christ and to make a difference.

As much as 10% of the Christian adult population in the United States currently attend micro-churches. The estimated 50% decline in traditional church attendance by 2025 may result in as

many as 35% of the nation's Christians taking advantage of this more intimate and dynamic micro-church format in the near future. This huge shift in church platforms will have a profound effect on the Body of Christ.

The return to Christianity's roots is reenergizing believers who have left the Church but who continue to seek fulfillment of God's calling in their lives. Many are finding their purpose after being stifled for years. Others are discovering for the first time the unlimited extent of God's love and grace.

Common Features

The modern day micro-church is unique in that each church establishes a model that fits the specific people that God has brought together and the mission that He is calling them to undertake. The size of the micro-church is a determining factor for many of the common characteristics that these small communities share.

Some of the features that micro-churches have in common include:

- **Small Membership Size**—Most micro-churches consist of 6 to 20 members. The twelve-member church appears to be optimal for facilitating close relationships.
- **Casual Venue**—Members worship in private homes or public places. The casual surroundings allow followers to develop close, sacred relationships.
- **Completely Mobile**—The venue can easily change from meeting to meeting because of the simplicity of this extraordinary church format.
- **Minimal Infrastructure**—The small church requires minimal or no infrastructure with which to carry out operations. A stealth environment allows the church to operate freely in carrying out God's agenda.
- **Bible-Centered**—The church service is centered around Bible study that is based directly on God's Word. Members accept the Bible as the true, authentic, and sufficient Word of God.
- **Non-Denominational**—Doctrines and religious traditions are abandoned for direct interaction with the Word. This allows members to start with a clean slate and to develop a shared belief system.
- **Streamlined Format**—With no infrastructure to maintain or programs to run, the modest community is able to focus efforts and resources on helping others.
- **Efficient Resource Management**—The efficient footprint within which the church is designed optimizes resource requirements, allowing members to achieve more with less.
- **Nominal Legal Basis**—Most churches have no formal organization, legal basis, or financial structure. They are able to operate legally under the radar where resources can be advantageously used for the mission.
- **Kingdom-Oriented**—The micro-church is connected to the Body of Christ through mutually-beneficial relationships that help unite Christians.
- **Expandable Model**—Size constraints make it inevitable that new churches will need to be planted to accommodate membership growth. Churches can be easily replicated because of their unique design.
- **Fully-Networked**—Micro-churches network with other micro-churches, traditional churches, ministries, non-profits, and for-profit businesses for maximum impact.

Size does have an effect on the way in which micro-churches are designed. When designed properly, they are pound for pound more productive than their traditional church counterparts. The focused approach creates a sense of urgency that dedicated members respond to whole-heartedly.

Community Characteristics

The micro-church is built around a sacred community of like-minded followers of Christ. A God-centered mentality allows members to find their purpose and contribute to God's plan for the church to help others. Members thrive in an intimate environment where they are inspired to produce great works that further the Kingdom of God.

Micro-church communities typically share the following characteristics:

- **Intimate Environment**—The community facilitates the social connection that imparts a sense of belonging. Member growth and maturity in Christ are accelerated by this intimate environment.
- **Open Communication**—Open communication eliminates many of the trust issues experienced in other types of churches. The intimate environment rapidly builds trust among members.
- **Shared Leadership**—Micro-churches are controlled by their members through shared leadership. They act autonomously within the Body of Christ, having derived their authority directly from Christ.
- **All-Volunteer**—Members share responsibility for the planned objectives of the church and mission. Each person steps up in their area of expertise to share knowledge and experience.
- **Committed Members**—All members are totally invested in the church and mission. The small membership size compels members to participate fully in accomplishing the shared objectives.
- **Value-Oriented**—Core values are developed firsthand from biblical teachings. These values unite the members and drive them to achieve the calling that God has placed on the church.
- **Divine Purpose**—Churches are established for the express purpose of contributing to God's overall plan. Members truly understand God's love and grace and strive fully to discover and carry out His calling.
- **Vision-Driven**—Activities carried out by the church are vision-driven. Goals and objectives inject a sense of urgency into the church's intent to achieve God's plan.
- **Spirit-Guided**—The Holy Spirit facilitates a direct connection with God, which empowers members to stand confidently in Christ.
- **Like Demographics**—Members with shared demographic characteristics are able to focus on common objectives for advancing the Kingdom of God.
- **Discipleship-Oriented**—Jesus calls all Christians to follow Him and become disciples. The ultimate goal of the micro-church is to spread the Good News, either directly or by facilitating an indirect mechanism that does.

Small Group Dynamic

The small group dynamic at work within the micro-church results in a non-judgmental setting where shortcomings are accepted. A team mentality is instilled in a relatively short period of time as the group melds into a cohesive community.

Community members are generous with their time, money, and other contributions. The selfless group has genuine concern for each member and the people who are served by their mission. This caring attitude allows micro-churches to perform exceptionally as a team while members work together to help others.

Members share many other aspects of life together. A weekly meal commemorating the Last Supper is the focal point of the community. A close family-like bond is developed through participation in the church and mission, as well as other outside activities.

Mission Features

The mission to which a micro-church is called allows members to share the love that God has freely given to them. The ultimate goal of Christians is to pass on what God gives them to help others. The missional micro-church model includes common features that assist members with this pursuit. These features include:

- **Purpose-Driven**—Members of micro-churches are driven to help others. Each church has a purpose that includes directly or indirectly helping those less fortunate.
- **Narrow Focus**—Missions typically serve a small segment of the community and focus on specific services.
- **Fast-Moving**—Accommodating design parameters enables the mission to move quickly and to change directions with little negative impact on momentum.
- **Efficient Operations**—Mission activities are typically designed for economic efficiency. This allows most churches to operate with minimal resources.
- **Impactful Objectives**—Missions deliver maximum relative impact with minimum organizational structure.
- **Well-Coordinated**—The organized approach empowers members to utilize fully their strengths to achieve the objectives.

Most missions are based in the neighborhoods within which the members live and worship. Each mission is unique, typically serving a small segment of the community. Mission activities are integrated with the efforts of outside partners, such as other micro-churches, traditional churches, or non-profits.

Some micro-churches function as a volunteer force that helps to accomplish the mission objectives of another organization. Others join forces with other micro-churches to achieve a common mission. Many simply provide a service that does not require extensive funding or infrastructure.

Micro-church builders should strive to establish consistency wherever possible. This will not only provide uniformity within the overall movement but will make the processes of planting new churches and networking with other organizations much easier. The cohesion created by this consistency will help to bring the Body of Christ into unity.

TOOL 2: Common Feature Worksheet—*Identifies key features that can be incorporated into new micro-churches being designed.*