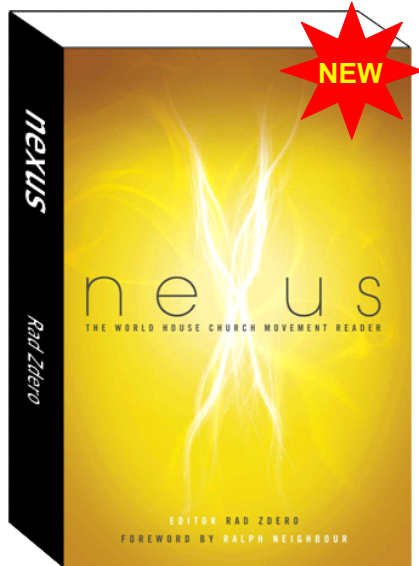


NEXUS: THE WORLD HOUSE CHURCH MOVEMENT READER



- 500 pages ■ 60 chapters
- 40 authors ■ 20 countries
- 1 purpose

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- Foreword by: Dr. Ralph Neighbour
- Publisher: William Carey Library
- Publication Date: June 2007

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FROM THE INTRODUCTION – WELCOME TO THE *NEXUS* !

Dear reader, this is your point of connection—your nexus—to today’s world house church movement! The book you hold in your hand is not merely meant to satisfy your curiosity about what God is accomplishing in various places around the globe through other people. Yes, it will help you discover how God is building himself an army of ordinary folks to accomplish great exploits for his kingdom. But, it is also meant to stir you up so that you will actually go forth and become part of this revolutionary force of grassroots, living, breathing Christianity. The *Nexus* was deliberately designed with your training and learning in mind, with study questions at the end of each chapter that will provoke you to pray, think, feel, and act!

THE WINDS OF CHANGE ARE BLOWING THROUGH THE CHURCH

The church of Jesus Christ has always adapted itself to new circumstances and contexts. But, today’s changes are happening on a massive scale unseen in history. A fresh Christianity is on the rise all around the world. God is bringing back the power and simplicity of grassroots, New Testament-style Christianity to the earth. This is not driven by human genius or plans, but rather by the Spirit of God blowing through the church, cleansing it, shaking it, changing it, stretching it, and preparing it to better deal with the persecution, poverty, unity, and revival of the years ahead. The Lord himself is raising up the world house church movement.

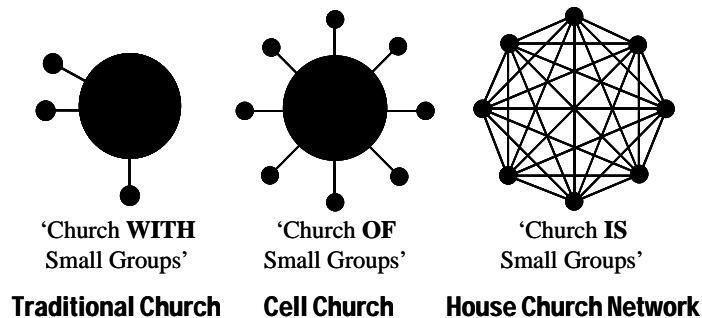
Recently, unprecedented numbers of people have come to faith in Christ and then launched out to plant new communities of faith, repeating the process over and over again. This phenomenon is sweeping across many parts of the globe. Consider the following. Northern India has seen 4,000 churches planted in just a decade. Latin America witnessed two Baptist unions surmount persecution to grow from 235 to 3,200 churches in a mere eight years. China saw 160,000 new Chinese believers baptized in a single year. Ethiopia underwent a decade of persecution by Marxist authorities, under whose harsh watch a Pentecostal denomination grew from 5,000 to 50,000 believers through underground house groups. Cuba’s petrol crisis catalyzed the growth of between 6,000 and 10,000 multiplying house churches from 1992 to 2000. Cambodia saw the start of 220 house churches with 10,000 new believers from 1992 to 2001. The USA witnessed Dove Christian Fellowship grow in 20 years from three cell groups totaling 25 people to 80 cell group and house church networks spread across five continents and encompassing over 20,000 people. In less than a decade, the USA-based

Church Multiplication Associates started 1,000 churches that meet in homes, offices, and just about anywhere.

What is happening in all these diverse places? The answer: *saturation church planting through simple, inexpensive, reproducible, and missional congregations of ‘house churches’*. Research on mission work around the globe has discovered that the most rapidly growing church planting and evangelistic strategies today utilize home-based and house-sized churches.

WHAT’S THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN SMALL GROUPS, CELL GROUPS, AND HOUSE CHURCHES?

The question that now naturally arises is: What’s the difference between small groups, cell groups, and the main topic of this book, namely, house churches? Many believers today participate in ‘small groups’, such as Bible study groups, prayer groups, accountability groups, affinity groups, etc. However, ‘small groups’ are often utilized differently in various types of churches, which will be broadly classified here for the purpose of discussion as traditional churches, cell churches, and house church networks. Small groups in all three styles of churches usually meet in homes and encourage the participation of believers. But, that’s where the similarities end. While we must clearly recognize and celebrate the hand of God in all manner of churches, there are important differences between traditional churches, cell churches, and house churches that should be understood. On one end of the spectrum, for instance, is the *traditional church* that only infrequently uses small groups (often misnamed ‘cell groups’)—this can be described as a ‘church *WITH* small groups.’ Further along the spectrum is the *cell church* that places an equal or greater emphasis on its mission-minded small groups (properly called ‘cell groups’) compared to its weekly large group services—this can be described as a ‘church *OF* small groups.’ However, the *house church network* sees each house church as a fully fledged, autonomous, church in itself—this can be explained by the principle that ‘church *IS* small groups’ (see diagram).



WHAT IS A HOUSE CHURCH?

Let us describe the ‘house church’ in more detail, drawing out points of contrast with small groups and cell groups where necessary. Though exceptions and variations appear even in this book, the following description is generally reflective of the world house church movement today.

Firstly, house churches are an attempt to get back to early grassroots Christianity by following the New Testament pattern. The term ‘house church’ is just a convenient label that involves a much broader effort to see the pattern and power, the simplicity and strategy, of the early church fully restored. This involves far more than seeing small groups of believers meeting in living rooms and around kitchen tables for prayer and Bible study. House churches, rather, intentionally wish to implement sweeping changes to both church function and form back to a more streamlined New Testament blueprint, so that more people can be effectively reached for Christ. House churches, therefore, are part of a ‘restoration’ of biblical church life for the sake of biblical mission. Traditional churches, on the other hand, use small groups as an optional ‘enhancement’ program for an otherwise traditional church system that includes church buildings, hierarchical leadership systems, preplanned worship services, and expensive programs. Cell churches, though sharing the same passion for biblical mission and church renewal as the house church movement, still retain some traditional organizational features.

Secondly, house churches are fully functioning churches in and of themselves. Consequently, they engage in a full range of activities like the Lord's Supper, baptisms, burials, marriages, money management, church discipline, and charting their own course. They gather in homes for interactive meetings that involve worship and prayer, Bible discovery and discussion, mentoring and evangelism, mutual ministry and encouragement, as well as food and fun. Each house church is commonly facilitated by a co-equal team of unpaid leaders. Traditional churches, however, often do not fully release their small groups to be the church in many of these matters. Cell churches often go much further than their traditional counterparts in empowering cell group members for ministry inside and outside the cell.

Thirdly, house churches are self-governing with regard to their own internal affairs. This means that decision-making responsibility rests with the group itself by consensus of all its members. Thus, a house church does not require permission for its activities from a formal paid minister or even other house churches, nor is it part of a highly centralized church system. As such, these groups more easily adapt to persecution, growth, and change. Both traditional small groups and even cell groups, though, in many matters must seek permission or guidance from a formal pastor, a zone leader, a church board, or some other vertical chain of command.

Fourthly, house church meetings are open to the leading of the Spirit of God. These meetings allow everyone's spiritual gifts to be used, since they are participatory, interactive, spontaneous, and Spirit-led (1 Cor 14:26, Col 3:16). Jesus is the Master of Ceremonies who leads each member and directs the meeting. There are no one-man shows or a few active people performing for a crowd of spectators. Everyone can become involved. Traditional small groups and cell groups, in contrast, often have a preplanned agenda for meetings, though cell groups by design wish to allow the Spirit to lead them in making a positive impact on non-believers.

Fifthly, house churches are formed with the intention of growth through the multiplication of new house churches. These simple faith communities desire to be active, reproducing, neighborhood mission outposts which see people come to Christ, grow in faith, get trained, and launch out as ambassadors of hope to repeat the process in unreached areas by planting other house churches. This is a deliberate strategy on the part of today's house church movement. Many traditional church and cell church planting approaches, however, use an initial 'home group' as a vehicle for the birth of a larger centralized congregation equipped with a building, paid senior pastor, and programmed Sunday morning worship service.

Sixthly, house churches form cohesive networks with one another as peers and partners in a 'decentralized' way. Isolated house churches tend not to be healthy and do not survive for too long. Vibrant house churches, however, unite together into networks for mutual encouragement, accountability, resourcing, and training. As such, there are three strands that often connect autonomous house churches together into clusters, namely, (a) mobile 'circuit riders' that travel from group-to-group and place-to-place, (b) house church leaders' meetings that are held on a regular basis, and (c) city-wide or regional events that happen occasionally such as conferences and celebrations. However, this is done less formally than with cell churches, in which cell groups are but one part of a larger church system that has a leadership structure that is fixed, multi-layered, and 'centralized'.

THE BOOK IN YOUR HAND

Do you want to reach people with an approach to church life and church planting that is biblical, simple, inexpensive, reproducible, and a training ground for launching new leaders? Do you want to start a vibrant network of multiplying house churches right where you live? If so, this book is for you. The contributing authors are practitioners, leaders, and academics from all over the world with many years of involvement in the 'revitalization' of the Body of Christ. Their collective wisdom is provided in six main parts:

- Part 1. God's Passion for the World
- Part 2. The New Testament Origins of House Churches
- Part 3. House Church and Small Group Movements through the Ages
- Part 4. House Church Movements on the World Scene Today
- Part 5. Practical Lessons in Starting a House Church Network

Part 6. Strategic Directions for Launching House Church Movements

It is with the compelling hope of seeing many, new, vibrant, house church movements launched which reach, heal, and transform the nations for Jesus Christ, that this work is offered. Once again, welcome to the *Nexus*! Let's be about our Master's business!

Rad Zdero (Editor)
Toronto, Canada
May 2007

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