

## Questions and Answers

Question:

"There's a good possibility that we're going to be having a home church in our home in the near future. I'd really like to hear some suggestions, advice, 'what we shoulda done's', anything that might help us get started off on the right foot and avoid some pitfalls . . .

—*Thanks, Bob and Sherrill Hawley*

Answer:

When we started, we treated the gathering as though it were a "church service." That was a mistake. The idea of "being the church" is to leave room for everybody to participate, not to have a few skilled people "do church" for the guests. Also, it is important to meet often, at least once a week. In Malachi 3:16 it speaks of those who "fear the Lord and speak often to each other." A community tends to make it a priority to spend time together. One of the big hurdles for anyone making the transition from "normal" church to home church is getting beyond the meeting mentality and moving toward relational community. That takes time and intentionality.

You may have folks with you who want to think of the gathering as a "Bible study" or "fellowship group." That is an indication that they are still viewing the big church service on Saturday or Sunday as the real church, and the home church as something less. Part of the challenge is to get comfortable with the small group as "the church."

In our situation, we finally ended up terminating the Sunday service altogether! Now, we are beginning to do a multi-congregation (i.e., house church) celebration and reunion gathering monthly again. The good news (and the bad news) about the celebrations is that now it is hard to convince people that they are a priority anymore! Another problem with the celebrations is that folks sometimes just congregate with people who they already know well, rather than use the time as a chance to meet others from different groups and strengthen the relational network among house churches.

### Dealing With Kids in the Home Church Setting

There are so many variables with the kids—age, temperament, gender—it's tough to generalize. Your approach will likely be decided by the parents. Some parents feel strongly that their kids should be with Mom and Dad while they are together as the church. Others welcome a break from parenting responsibilities for at least part of the time by hiring, as a group, somebody to help with the kids, or trading the responsibility among themselves. Be ready to address the needs of the kids. It will be one of your first opportunities to work through some of the practical issues of church life. Diverse parenting styles can present some serious challenges to group unity.

### Giving

Here's what I encourage regarding giving. First, tithing is a great discipline, but generosity is the real New Testament principle. What you give is first a matter between you and the Father. No person or organization has a prior claim on your money. That's God's place. That means you should prayerfully decide where your privilege of generosity should be directed. What's the Lord saying? That's the place to start.

The epistle of James also has something to say about how our giving should be directed: "If a brother or sister is without clothing and in need of daily food, and one of you says to them, 'Go in peace, be warmed and be filled,' and yet you do not give them what is necessary for their body, what use is that? Even so faith, if it has no works, is dead, being by itself" (James 2:14-17).

Another option is to set money aside as a church for ministry purposes. Have somebody open an account for the congregation; keep a coffee can for ministry. The Summit network has an account for groups that want to use it. I think it's cool when a group decides together how to be generous. One house church gave hundreds to disaster relief. Three networks in Texas contributed to the publication of House2House magazine. Get creative together!

Most of the groups that I know are informal when it comes to giving. Many put a bowl or a basket somewhere when they meet, a few "take an offering," while still others just share with each other. One thing is true, though, when a group talks about money, it raises some interesting responses. Try it. Talking about our "stuff" tends to poke at some deep feelings. Approach such discussions with prayer, patience and, most of all, love.

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