

Vineyard (de)Central(ized) and on the Move

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Giving Life Through Re-Visioning

"Where there is no vision the people perish" Proverbs

What's the opposite of perishing? It's life, vibrancy, thriving. With vision, the network of home churches called Vineyard Central can be a thriving, living, vibrant spiritual ecosystem. So please consider this little document a work in progress, a working paper if you will that can be amended and added to, clarified and challenged by you, the reader. We'll be looking at the structure and model of home churching but that's not the point. The point is experiencing and sharing an abundant life together. It's living the adventure of co-working with God to see his kingdom more fully expressed on earth; that means in our neighborhoods, homes, workplace and even ourselves. "May Your kingdom come, Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven."

Summary: Vineyard (de)Central(ized)

Everything that follows flows from the vision and purposes that God has given Vineyard Central over the past several years. For those who have been around awhile and paying attention there's nothing new in what follows. I should also note from the beginning that the wider context of this vision is set in the mission we share with all other followers of Christ namely passionately loving God, loving neighbor and making disciples. (The Great Commandments and Great Commission). From within that broader context we can summarize our particular vision, our way of fulfilling the Great Commandments and Great Commission in our context. A simple statement should do: We exist to plant, support and link home churches and networks of home churches. What follows is simply unpacking and clarifying that vision.

First, let's define "home churches?" A home church is a small, God-centered, missional community of seekers and followers of Christ. I want to especially emphasize that word "missional." These home churches exist to partner with Christ's mission in the world. Home churches come together primarily to encourage and equip their members through mutual love and the gifts of the Spirit (I Corinthians 12-14) but they are sent from each meeting with the mandate to be salt and light in their everyday lives at work, home and neighborhoods. This means we're constantly seeking ways to further God's purposes in the world 7 days a week. The meetings, the coming together weekly, prepares us for that mission.

I'm occasionally asked, "Do these gatherings only occur in homes?" The answer is obviously no. However, there are distinct advantages to meeting in homes. Would you agree that to some extent our environment shapes our attitudes and behavior? If we want to become families (and we do), then meeting in homes fosters that. On the other hand, being missional may require that we meet in another place. So, generally, I encourage churches to consider meeting in homes unless there's a strong missionary reason not to.

A summary of where we've been and where we're heading could be summarized as, "from a local church (where we've been) to a network of home-based churches (where we are) to a church planting movement (where we're headed)."

The (ongoing) transition: From local church to decentralized network

There has been a lot of energy expended to move us beyond being a local church. Yet in some ways we're still straddling the fence trying to be both a local church and a network of home churches. Unlearning takes lots of time and this includes leaders as much or more than anyone else. Long term the two models are simply incompatible. So I propose we once and for all abandon acting like a local church and really press into being a network of home churches. It's time to cut bait on existing as a local church and time to fish as missional home churches. I'd like to first define the difference between a local church and a home church network then lay out some of the practicalities of what it will take for us to function more as a network. However, let me mention at this point that being a network isn't our highest aim.

There's more than that and the last section of this document touches on that higher aim. Transitioning from a local church mindset to a network is not necessary preliminary to what comes next. More on that later.

Here are some differences between a typical small local church and a network of home churches:

- Weekly gatherings of whole church are a major focus demonstrated by investments of time, energy, money into them vs Smaller gatherings are central to life of church
- Big building as focus of the life of the church vs. Gathering in homes, offices, restaurants etc
- Sr. Pastor does majority of pastoral care vs. Peer-based care among home church members via spiritual gifts (especially prophecy I Cor 14) and oversight by a leadership team
- Pastor has "office hours" and spends majority of his/her time in office/study vs. Leaders are usually "in the harvest field" planting churches and training leaders on-the-job
- Sr. Pastor does vast majority of the teaching vs. HC pastors leading an interactive discussion where many can contribute something to the learning
- Smaller gatherings (cells, kinships, small groups) are optional vs. Smaller gatherings are primary
- Programs developed for evangelism, discipleship, mercy ministry etc vs. Ministry flows naturally out of the life of the home church
- Decisions made by paid staff vs. Each HC has autonomy to make decisions and pursue God-given direction within broad parameters of loving God, loving others and making disciples
- Information flows from central office to church body vs. Information flows from all directions not necessarily through a "hub" (email's great for this!)
- Sermons as monologue vs Teaching in HC interactive with room for many contributors and Q and A
- Supporting missionaries vs. Sending missionaries
- Leaders (pastors) trained in college and seminary vs. On the job and "in the harvest" training (seminary may come later...)

Most of the barriers to becoming a network of home churches are in our head. We (especially those of us who have been Christians for a while) have a lot of unlearning to do. There's still a lot of road to hoe with respect to how we understand the "pastor's role", the non-centrality of our building, the office's role, and how we handle money/ budget. I'm also aware there's probably lots more baggage that we're not even aware of yet. We just need to peel it off one layer at a time. But, with each layer shed we'll become more lean and agile and able to move faster and farther toward our God-given calling.

How this affects my role...

From Sr. Pastor to Coordinator, equipper, and "apostolic" leader...

I know that "Home church coordinator" isn't as sexy or respectable as "Sr. Pastor" and maybe a better term will emerge. Functionally though "Coordinator" speaks to my role much better. The term "pastor" has so much baggage attached to it that it no longer communicates what it originally meant. In the sense of a pastor being an (not the) overseer, it fits. In the American version of "good sermon pastor" as I (con)descend from my pulpit to shake the hands of ill equipped lay-people exiting the "church" on Sunday morning -- it don't fit!

My role is simply to coordinate and equip. I'm not to do all the pastoring, all the teaching, all the evangelism etc... My role is to insure that the pastors, pastor and the teachers teach, and evangelists evangelize, the counselors counsel, and administrators administrate (and so on) while everyone becomes and makes disciples of Jesus. That's what I mean by coordination. I don't do all the work, but I have a responsibility to make sure it's getting done.

For me this is incredibly freeing. I know I'm not the best teacher or counselor (among other things) in Vineyard Central. This doesn't absolve me of my responsibility to teach or counsel. I still get to do some. Like a team captain, I still get to play. But if others are more gifted they should be encouraged to go for it and bless us with their gifts... right? I shouldn't try to play all the positions on the field.

When it comes to equipping I want to focus my training on raising up pastors for HC's, planters of HC and

missionaries sent from VC to plow new fields with our DNA. That's it. And it's already begun. We have started a three module (1 year long) training course for emerging leaders in VC. The first module (Fall) hammers home basic discipleship concepts and actions, the second module (Winter) focuses on leading in a home church context, and the third module (Spring) is actively leading with feedback.

At a recent training event we hosted called Greenhouse as well as at our Simple Churches conference last month the terms "apostle" and "apostolic leadership" used quite a bit. Most of my previous exposure to those terms has come from scripture where I always understood it to mean "one of the 12" or conference advertisements where "Apostle So and So" was going to be performing at a conference (yuck!). I've always had a distaste for the term other than referring to the original 12. That's starting to change. I still think the term demands a lot more theological reflection before we just start calling people apostles (note: little "a") however functionally I see this operating throughout church history right up to today. Perhaps we should conceive of the function as someone like a Barnabas (Acts 4,9,11,13) or Paul (Acts 9-28) who plants churches, equips leaders, and is sent to serve the wider body of Christ (ie beyond one city) in short spurts. If that's the type of function we're talking about then that is a legitimate explanation of my role... and by the way I'm not the only one in VC who will function that way.

What about you?

I've been wrestling with what a transition from local church mind set to network of home churches means for my role. That's something I would encourage each of us to do. What part are you going to play on this team? How do you conceive of your role in the context of this network of home churches? I think it'd be good if we all had an understanding of the part we are to play both in our home churches and the network and then communicated that with one another so we can be accountable for it. If you take me up on this, please pass on what you come up with to your home church and copy me in as well. If you have gifts that could serve this body that are being under-utilized or you'd like to explore a new avenue of ministry, please let me know. I'll do my best to see that what you have to offer to gets expressed among us.

What's next? From Decentralized network to church planting movement...

In 2001 we devoted a lot of effort to simply living up to our identity as a network of home churches. I believe this was just the background, the setting of the stage for what's next: a church planting movement in Greater Cincinnati.

In 2002 I believe the Lord wants to push us beyond being a network of home churches to becoming a movement of home churches. Learning to "church" in smaller settings was only the beginning. The learning is not just for us. It's for "them"... our friends, family, neighbors, work associates, school mates, etc. The original vision that I signed up for (that Dave wrote about 8 years ago when we first went to decentralized meetings) states that there will be hundreds of home churches all over Cincinnati. I still believe that vision is from God. I don't think we're meant to be a network of 6-10 home churches. I believe God wants to blow the doors and the roof off this thing and partner with us for exponential growth... not for "growth's" sake but for the advancement of His kingdom, His glory, His fame and our joy.

What will it take to become a church planting movement?

- Praying like we've never prayed before for God to move mightily in our city
- Discipleship becomes everyone's priority. It's interesting that God in Scripture never commands anyone to plant a church. The command is to "make disciples" ie help others become followers and apprentices of Jesus. I'm convinced that if we'll take care of making disciples, a church planting movement will naturally emerge.
- Home churches understanding they are churches. This means they have the authority to make disciples, baptize, teach, send missionaries, make financial decisions, share communion, evangelize and so on. It also means they have responsibility to make disciples, baptize, teach, send... you get it.
- On the job training for leaders. A centralized curriculum is not enough. We won't be able to keep up with the need for leaders in the home churches. That means that each HC must become a training point for multiplying new leaders. Who are you training to lead in your HC or to plant another one? Every HC should have an answer to that question and a plan to see it happen. We need to stay ahead of the curve on leadership training and that will require both a centralized curriculum and "on the job" training.

•Releasing control and not masking our desire for control in the name of excellence or quality or concern for “doctrine” or unity. This means we have to trust each other (or rather the Holy Spirit in each other) and let one another “fail “ and try again.

• We need a renewed willingness to send our best. That means we may have to at times say good-bye to some close friends so they can plant another church down the street or around the world. Sometimes we must sacrifice fellowship for mission (Acts 13:1-3). This is God’s plan. He’s a missionary at heart. The Father sacrificially sent the Son. The Son sacrificially came to earth. The Son commissioned (sent) the church. When the church huddled in Jerusalem, persecution broke out. (Compare Acts 1.8 to Acts 8.1) God is highly committed to His mission. It may even impinge on our comfort. It probably will.

Resources for becoming a movement

Here are some of the books I’ll be rereading in 2002 that explain the ways and means of becoming a church planting movement... If you want to explore with me, these are a great place to start...

- The Spontaneous Expansion of the Church by Roland Allen
- Missionary Methods: St. Paul or Ours? by Roland Allen
- Church Planting Movements by David Garrison (free booklet from imb.org)
- Houses that Change the World by Wolfgang Simson
- The Celtic Way of Evangelism by George Hunter III
- The Tipping Point by Malcolm Gladwell
- Missional Church edited by Darrel Guder

You can download a fuller, less polished pdf edition of this document by clicking [here](#).

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