

“the meal” ...yeah, it’s church for the rest of us!

One of the most elemental definitions of “church” is: a group of Christ followers who fully function, understand, and believe themselves to be the Body-of-Christ in their sphere of influence.

Friends in any micro-culture (and their network of unchurched relationships) can become simple relational churches. Each cluster can become a “complete” Body of Christ by living out these 5 basics (or functions) of church life:

- m**...mentor each person toward bringing his/her own friends and expressing his/her own weekly God-journey with the group...(life-involvement evangelism)
- e**...eat, share life concerns, and pray around the table...(supportive friendships)
- a**...apply a Bible passage to how you live, as a group dialogue...(obedience-based discipleship)...the leader needs to choose a practical passage before the gathering
- I**...love the Lord with all your heart, and others as yourself...(worship, and servanthood)

Many passionate Christians are making the choice to birth relevant church-bodies that totally transform overlooked groups of friends (who gave mentally distanced themselves from the regular church). They support themselves entirely by a personal career, as part of a revolutionary movement to follow Christ.

*Ben radiates as he shares about the church-body of young adults and families that gather in his home. They begin to arrive about 10AM and sometimes stay well past the noon fellowship meal. During their few hours together they flow, almost without direction, through life-sharing fellowship, Bible discussion, prayer, worship, and ministry projects...usually in a different sequence each week...often taking a snack or play break with the kids. He says it is the most engaging church they have ever experienced. **It is easy to bring friends** to such a group. Everyone has time to listen, to laugh, and to encourage one another. Not only are people coming to know Christ and maturing in their faith, it is transforming how they live! **Ben challenges them regularly to grow spiritually to the point of beginning such a church in their own homes.***

How to Begin

1. Ask God to arrange encounters between you and the friends/acquaintances/strangers in whom He has been stirring up a deep spiritual yearning. Keep praying and sharing until some are ready to journey with you in this church...it only takes a few. Trust His Spirit to connect you to the right ones, and to have their hearts open. Many will not yet be Christians. **Don’t begin until HE guides you to the person or group HE has been preparing.**
2. Plan the meal to be easy and casual...it may be just snacks or coffee...**focus on God and relationships**, not food/cooking/eating.
3. Gather at a home, apartment, park, café, etc. Use the acrostic to guide you in carrying out the **five basics** of the church: life-involvement evangelism, supportive friendships, obedience-based discipleship, servanthood, and simple but sincere worship.
4. At every gathering ask God to continue arranging encounters between participants and people in whom He has created a heart hunger for the person of Christ. **Always be authentic, never false**, in caring for another person. Be sensitive to their needs. Bring them to the meal with you. Never manipulate. Include and value each one.
5. Personally pray for God to raise up an “intern” who will work with you and reproduce “the meal” church in another group. Seek to “refocus” and multiply about every 6 months!

continued...

Need more ideas about how “the meal” functions?

- including not-yet-Christians in the meal allows them to experience how Christ is working in the lives of believers...and be drawn to Him themselves. 1 Cor. 14:24-26
- as you eat take turns sharing (1) where you have seen God at work this week, (2) what has the world been dumping on you, (3) what are your needs currently.
- guide the group to pray for all concerns that are mentioned...sentence prayers or silent prayers may fit best.
- pick practical scriptures like Phil. 4, Matt. 5-7, John 8, Eph. 4, Gal. 6, Jam. 4, all of Psalms...guide everyone to dialogue over what it says about (1) God, (2) self, (3) others, (4) life.
- love the Lord with your words and your actions...worship through testimony, music/CD, art, video, silence/awe, and life actions/sacrifices for His purposes (any combination).
- practice servanthood by taking an offering to help someone, by personally meeting another's needs, by group projects...get involved with people & their needs!

Biblical Model for “the meal”...Romans 16:3-5 God clearly recognizes this as a church!

1. How did Prisca & Aquila make a living? (Acts 18:3)
2. Where did their church meet? What was the furniture for their church? How did they Worship? Disciple? Experience Community together? Minister to others? Share Christ?
3. Who gave them permission?
4. Who was probably their leader? What training/preparation/credentials did the leader have?
5. How big did the church get? How long did it last?
6. How much did it cost financially? What did they do with offerings?
7. How much good did it accomplish?

The Five Basics of Church life (recurring patterns or defining traits):

Worship.Evangelism.Discipleship.Ministry.Community

...some add missions, church planting, etc., but you read Scripture and trust His Spirit to guide you in defining the essence of “church”. *When your group begins living true to those Bible basics, then call it the Body-of-Christ, The Church!*

(radically elemental and contagiously powerful, don't you think!)