

CHURCH



C *in the* HOUSE

"And daily in the temple, and in every house, they did not cease teaching and preaching Jesus as the Christ"

Acts 5:42

PAUL GALLIGAN

Church in the House

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cease teaching and preaching Jesus as the Christ”
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**An Introduction to House Churches...
Not going to Church! But being the Church!**

Since we began Revival Ministries in 1998, we have been committed to planting the church in the house. We knew from the beginning that ‘we are the church’ and the Lord showed us to practice the ‘first works’ according to Acts 2:42. We did this everywhere we went, encouraging meetings in the house.

However, it was becoming increasingly clear that, according to the New Testament Scriptures, Church in the house is the Church in its primary and ongoing expression. **As the Holy Spirit led we broke the congregation at our home base into smaller house Churches in 2007.**

**Paul Galligan
REVIVAL MINISTRIES AUSTRALIA**

REVIVAL MINISTRIES AUSTRALIA

an apostolic ministry to the nations

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Revival Ministries Australia, PO Box. 2718, TOOWOOMBA Q.4350,

Location address:

SHILOH Centre, 19 Russell St. Toowoomba, AUSTRALIA

Email: rma@revivalministries.org.au

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Part One

BIBLICAL HOUSECHURCH

AN INTRODUCTION TO HOUSE CHURCHES

- **Not going to Church!**
- **But being the Church!**

Since we began Revival Ministries in 1998, we have been committed to planting the church in the house. We knew from the beginning that **'we are the church'** and the Lord showed us to practice the **'first works'** according to **Acts 2:42**. This we did everywhere we went, even in the car as we travelled and even on the aeroplane when we went internationally.

We encouraged meetings in the house wherever we went and for some years as we have travelled in Australia, we have been received in many houses and not so many church buildings.

Early in 2007, we asked our folk who were meeting in a congregational meeting at SHILOH Centre on Sundays to break up as a congregation and meet in smaller house churches. We already had two house churches meeting on Sundays in localities outside of the city of Toowoomba, but since January three more house churches met in the city. One of these groups continues to meet in the SHILOH Centre but sitting in a circle and functioning more like a house church meeting.

On one Sunday each month the five house churches come together for a **Community Sunday celebration**. On that weekend we also have a special Friday night meeting with worship and time to wait upon the Lord and on the Saturday a **training day** from 10am to 4pm. This was our practice in those days and with some variation, we continue to meet in various house churches.

Brethren from regional house churches, even from far distances, gathered with us on those special weekends and they have become very significant times in our church life.

The reasons we made the change in home base from a congregational meeting to house churches were:

- to enhance the **accountability of each individual saint to be a contributing member** in the church meeting (**1Cor.14:26**)
- to encourage each individual saint or family to **take responsibility for the well-being of the other members** of the house church (**Acts 2:44-45**).
- to give to each member **a sense of ownership**: ‘I am responsible and accountable for the success of this church’.

Meeting in the smaller groups

- a) enables individuals to function in giftings and contribute in the meeting
- b) encourages the brethren to begin to care for each other as the whole group operates more like a family
- c) facilitates the raising and training of new leadership, giving apprentices ministry experience.

Why House Churches?

As the apostolic church is restored, we need to teach from the Scriptures concerning the house church or the church that meets in the house. The model and practice of ‘local church’ in recent times is not according to the biblical pattern. The idea of dedicated buildings that are not used as part of everyday Christian life is not the practice of the Scriptures.

We do not need to build a sanctuary for God on the earth as there is only one sanctuary and that is the one mentioned in **Hebrews 9:11-12,24**. In **Matthew 18:20** Jesus says *“For where two or three are gathered together in My name, I am there in the midst of them.”* This is a sanctuary, two or three gathered with Jesus present in the midst.

The church of a city

In the Scripture the apostles wrote to **the church of a city**. In Jerusalem that church was led by apostles and elders [which included prophets, **Acts 15:22,32**]. In Antioch, the church was led by prophets and teachers (**Acts 13:1**), and from **Acts 14:23**, the practice was for

apostles to ordain elders in every place. There was the church of the city with either apostolic leadership or apostolically ordained elders in leadership.

The purpose of the ministries given is to equip and build up all the saints so that every member of the body of Christ is growing to maturity and learning how to function in the body (**Eph.4:11-16**).

Meeting in homes

In the Scripture **the church of the city met in various houses**. The apostles attended the house meetings and taught the apostles doctrine, (**Acts 2:42-47; 20:20**). The development of local churches numbering hundreds and thousands of saints is not a biblical development. A church that meets in the home is by definition limited in number. This means that **every person who is saved is automatically included in the life of the church**. The church of the city will in time number hundreds and even thousands of saints but they meet in house churches with a common eldership overseeing the church of the city.

WHERE DID THE CHURCH MEET?

The Church met in Houses

There is no evidence of large single congregations in the New Testament except when people gathered in the precincts of the temple of Jerusalem in the very early days of the church's life. The indisputable evidence of the New Testament is that **the church met in houses**.

Acts 2:44-47 tells us they met daily, from house to house; everyone's needs were met in the fellowship; they broke bread together, sang praises to God and people were getting saved every day.

Establishing the Church in Friendly Houses

As the church spread to other towns and cities the disciples followed the instructions Jesus had given them in **Matthew 10:6-15** and **Luke 10:1-12**, **establishing the church in friendly houses**.

Throughout the book of **Acts** and Paul's epistles there are many instances of the church meeting in the house.

Paul greets the various fellowships in Rome

For example, in **Romans 16:5** there was a church in Priscilla and Aquila's house; in **verse 10** Paul greets the household of Aristobulus. In **verse 11** he greets the household of Narcissus; in **verse 14** he greets a number of brethren who are together; in **verse 15** he greets the saints who are with the five brethren mentioned. There are five churches mentioned, and these fellowships are part of the church of Rome to whom Paul is writing.

The Myanmar experience

In the Union of Myanmar [formerly known as Burma] the indigenous church in recent decades was generally not allowed by the authorities to construct dedicated church buildings. This was a blessing in disguise even though there was some resentment among believers over this law.

The church meets from house to house. Some of the house meetings that gather to receive the visiting apostle number over one hundred, but it is normally 20-40 people who gather. In such gatherings there can be as many as half of them coming for salvation. Here we see the biblical example working; the lost are being added.

It has been an absolute delight to minister in the outlying areas of Myanmar going from town to town into house churches. It is a very biblical experience. On one occasion in a very isolated place the Holy Spirit came as on the day of Pentecost to a crowded house meeting of approximately 60 people, the majority of them being school students. Students and adults were speaking in new tongues [including English which they did not naturally know], prophesying, singing new songs in the Spirit and weeping in deep intercession. Some were drawn from the street to come up to see what was happening.

BIBLICAL BACKGROUND TO CHURCH IN THE HOUSE

The First House Church

It could be said that the first house church in the Bible met in the Garden of Eden, in the cool of the evening at Adam and Eve's place. This is where they met with YAHWEH [LORD]. Jesus said in **Matthew 18:20**, when two or three come together in his Name, He will be there in the midst.

In Jesus, our fellowship with God is restored, and that fellowship is with the Lord whenever we gather in His name. We are blessed to enjoy our Lord's fellowship "in the cool of the evening" (**Gen.3:8**).

What happened in Adam and Eve's house church?

We assume that YAHWEH God taught the word, making it clear to Adam and Eve what the Divine purpose was and warning them to beware of the wiles of the devil, that is, to not eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. Jesus said that if you receive the apostle you receive me (**Matt.10:40**). Jesus still comes into the midst where there are people gathered together in His name.

One can imagine that life in Adam's household after they had been expelled from the garden, included **Adam training up his sons to walk with God**. In the account of **Genesis 4** we find that both Cain and Abel had a personal relationship with God and had obviously been taught the doctrine of redemption through the offering of a lamb.

Noah's house church

The godly line from Seth through to Noah suggests the ongoing training from generation to generation in their fathers' households. Each firstborn son was prophetically named and trained up in the knowledge of God's redemptive purposes.

Finally, in Noah's family, his wife and his three sons and their wives, were all involved in building the ark of salvation in that generation.

The house church, consisting of the four families, worked together under the apostolic leadership of Noah. This was a mighty work they were called to, but the work we are called to is of equal

significance as we prepare an ark of salvation in our generation through the biblical ministry of **planting the church in every place, in friendly houses.**

Abraham a very successful House Church Leader

“For I have known him, in order that he may command his children and his household after him, that they keep the way of YAHWEH, to do righteousness and justice, that YAHWEH may bring to Abraham what He has spoken to him” Gen.18:19.

God says He chose Abraham because He foresaw that he would manage his own household well and thus be qualified to become the father of many nations, releasing the blessing of faith to every family (**Gen.12:3**). This blessing is through Christ and is for every family.

**The church is primarily to be planted in the home:
it is a family church.**

Long before Abraham had his own son Isaac, he had **many spiritual sons**. **Genesis 14:14** tells us that he had 318 trained men [servants] in his own house, who were able to go to war with him. If most of these men were married imagine how many souls were under Abraham’s care.

This house church was really a travelling village. Hundreds of families were living in tents, caring for their flocks and herds. And this was in the early years of Abraham’s ministry.

In Genesis 18:1-15 YAHWEH Himself actually visited Abraham and Sarah in their own tent. This was when YAHWEH prophesied the conception and birth of Isaac. The word of YAHWEH is to be released in the house church.

Whenever two or three gather together in His name, ‘I AM’ is present. HALLELUJAH! As we share in the faith of Abraham, we receive the blessing.

**God will visit us in our fellowships
and His word will be precious and powerful.**

A LAMB FOR A HOUSEHOLD

Reading from **Exodus 12** reveals to us that the Israelites living in Egypt, lived in households that included more than the immediate family. God instructed Moses that each household was to prepare a lamb (**Ex.12:3**). If the household was too small to consume in total the lamb, they were to join with another smaller household (**v4**). There was an optimum number of people to make up a household and in the context, it appears the average household was of that optimum size.

This is exciting teaching:

- **God has provided a lamb for every household.**
- **For every fellowship of God's people who come together there is a lamb.**
- **In the new covenant house church, God has provided a lamb, His own Son.**
- **Each household [house church] has been provided for and is authorised to break bread in the home. (Acts 2:46)**

Jesus Christ is the Lamb for every household

There is a wonderful example of this in **Acts 10** when Peter was invited to go to the house of Cornelius to share the good news of Jesus Christ with Cornelius together with his relatives and close friends. **The household that gathered received Jesus the Lamb of God, through the preaching of the apostle.**

Even as God provided deliverance for His people from Egypt through Moses, household by household, so now He has provided salvation for all people through Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ has appointed apostles and other ministers to establish the church in every house that will receive them.

Moses' Instruction for House Church

Moses taught how the house church is to function daily (**Deuteronomy 6:4-9**). The people of God in loving God with their whole heart and soul and strength must function in their houses as believers from day to day.

*“Hear, O Israel: YAHWEH our God, YAHWEH one!
You shall love YAHWEH your God with all your heart,
With all your soul, and with all your strength.
And these words which I command you today
shall be in your heart.*

*You shall teach them diligently to your children
and shall talk of them when you sit in your house,
when you walk by the way,
when you lie down,
and when you rise up.
You shall bind them as a sign on your hand,
and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes.
You shall write them on the door posts of your house
and on your gates” Deut.6:4-9.*

ESTABLISHING THE HOUSE CHURCH

The church is established in ‘friendly houses’ by preachers [apostles, evangelists, pastors or disciples as in **Acts 11**] being sent out in the will of the Lord.

In **Luke 10:1-24** Jesus gives us clear instructions to establish house churches in every place.

Going to every place before the Lord comes. The Lord appointed seventy others; sent them out two by two, before His face, to every place where He would go. We are to prepare every place for the coming of the Lord (**Luke 10:1**).

Labourers for the Harvest. Why do we need to establish a church in every place? Because Jesus said, *“The harvest truly is great, but the laborers are few; therefore, pray the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into His harvest”* (**Luke 10:2**)

Plenty of Opposition. Jesus said He was sending them out as lambs among wolves (**Luke 10:3**). There will be wolves, beware!

You will not be popular going out to plant a church in every place. You may meet with opposition from other established churches, if they are already there, and from the evil spirits in areas controlled by sorcery and false religions.

Walking in the Obedience of Faith. We are not to take anything with us but trust that God will supply; we are not to get off focus [no missionary tourism].

Jesus said, “greet no one along the road” (Luke 10:4). Do not allow distractions to take you off focus.

Led by Peace. Enter the house where a man of peace resides; in other words, where you are received (**Luke 10:5**).

Find a Friendly House. Have discernment: is this a ‘friendly’ house? If it is not a friendly house don’t remain in it (**Luke 10:6**).

Minister from that House. Remain in the friendly house; receive their hospitality; minister from that house (**Luke 10:7**). We are not meant to go knocking on every door; remain in the place where you are received, and seekers will be drawn.

A city is judged by their hospitality. A city will be judged by the way they receive the ones that the Lord sends (**Luke 10:8**).

Heal the Sick and Preach the Word. In the friendly house offer to pray for the sick (**Luke 10:9**). Jesus instructs us to heal the sick and to preach the kingdom of God. Others may be brought to the house to receive prayer for healing as the news spreads. The power of God is present to heal in that house! This opens up the opportunity to testify about Jesus.

Judgement comes to people and cities who do not receive preachers. Jesus said **‘Wipe the dust of that city off your feet’ [a prophetic act of judgment because they did not receive the Word]**. In so doing they were to warn the city of the judgement to come (**Luke 10:11-12**).

“He who hears you hears me, he who rejects you rejects Me, and he who rejects Me rejects Him who sent Me” Luke 10:16.

Receiving Jesus. It is as people receive Jesus, believing on His name that they are born again (**John.1:12**). If people reject the preaching, they are rejecting the Lord. We receive Jesus by believing on this Name. People will only know His name if we preach Him.

Authority over the Devil. The devil and demons are subject to us. Satan has been defeated, Jesus said *“I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven. Behold, I give you the authority to trample on serpents and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy, and nothing shall by any means harm you”* (**Luke 10:17-19**).

Salvation. Jesus emphasises that the greatest miracle is the new birth, bringing people into salvation. The goal is to see people saved (**Luke 10:20**). Salvation comes by revelation from God. **The Lord sends us so He can save people through our preaching (v21-22).**

Jesus reveals the Father to those that He wills (Matt.16:17).
People are saved through revelation.

The Mystery Revealed. This gospel we have received is the revelation of the mystery which was hidden from the Old Testament saints (**Luke 10:23-24**).

FUNCTIONING IN THE HOUSE CHURCH

In the Book of **Acts**, we see the church planted and functioning from house to house. In this study we are looking at aspects of the church functioning in the house.

Foundations Being Laid

- the coming of the Holy Spirit; giving power for ministry and witness as Jesus had promised in **Acts 1:8 (Acts 2:1-13)**
- Peter preaches Jesus, the Lord and Christ (**Acts 2:14-40**)
- The listeners were cut to the heart by the preaching of Jesus crucified, dead and risen. (v37)
- Peter tells them how to be saved: repent and believe the word, and *“they received the word gladly”*; be baptised; receive the Holy Spirit (v38-41)

**The foundations of the new church
are being laid by the apostles.**

Five fundamental functions of church life

Acts 2:42 reveals the five vital components of church life:

1. They **continued steadfastly** – this means what it says: the early believers continued devotedly or steadfastly in the other four components. Without a regular, full-on commitment to the things of faith, the church will not fulfil its purpose.
2. **Apostles’ doctrine**: the revelational teaching brought by apostles. All of the teaching is directly from the word of God.
3. **Fellowship**: the committed sharing together of the first church so that the needs of every person were met (**Acts 2:44-45**).
4. **Breaking of Bread**: The Table of the Lord, where we regularly remember Jesus as He told us to (**Acts 2:46; 1Cor.11:23-26**).
5. **Prayer**: daily prayer meetings (**Acts 3:1**).

The results of continuing steadfastly in these vital components of church life were:

- a) **Acts 2:43** Great fear came upon all the believers. This ‘fear’ is the fear of the Lord, which in the Old Testament is the equivalent of faith. Mighty signs and wonders were done by the apostles. The fear [faith] released the miraculous.
- b) **Acts 22:44** The believers were all together and shared all things in common. A true community emerged.
- c) **Acts 2:45 Possessions** and goods were sold, and the proceeds used to meet needs in community.
- d) **Acts 2:46 Daily** – continuing daily
 - in one accord – in agreement, no private agendas [**Acts 5:1-11**]
 - in the temple – they presented as a coherent, committed body of believers (**Acts 5:12-13**)
 - in the houses.

The central place of the Lord's Table - Acts 2:46

- They broke bread [Lord's Table] from house to house, "*a lamb for a household*" (Ex.12:3).
- The communion is fundamentally essential in the house church. They shared meals together with gladness and simplicity.

Many churches authorize home meetings, but never authorize the breaking of bread. Until all control (doctrine of the Nicolaitans **Revelation 2:6**) is taken off the believers, and Christians meet daily in homes, fulfilling the five fundamental functions of church, we will not experience "*our first love*" (**Rev.2:4-5**) for Jesus and fulfill His good acceptable and perfect will.

e) Acts 2:47 "*Praising God and having favour with all the people. And the Lord added to the church daily those who were being saved.*" The Lord added to the church, daily, those who needed salvation. When the church behaves and functions as it should, God will add.

PRACTICES OF THE BOOK OF ACTS CHURCH IN THE HOUSES

- i. They were praying late in the night. "*And being let go, they went to their own companions and reported all that the chief priests and elders had said to them*" Acts 4:23.
- ii. Peter and John went to their companions and reported to them. They found their companions meeting together in a house.
- iii. In one accord "*So when they heard that, they raised their voice to God with one accord*" Acts 4:24. They prayed together.
- iv. Renewed boldness "*And when they had prayed, the place where they were assembled together was shaken; and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit, and they spoke the word of God with boldness*" Acts 4:31.

The place [house] where they were meeting together was shaken and they were again filled with the Holy Spirit. They went out from the house prayer meeting preaching boldly.

- v. **All things in common** “*Now the multitude of those who believed were of one heart and one soul; neither did anyone say that any of the things he possessed was his own, but they had all things in common*” Acts 4:32. The result was revival broke out! **True community releases revival: many others want to belong (v.33).**
- vi. **Preaching with great power** Acts 4:33 “*And with great power the apostles gave witness to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus. And great grace was upon them all*” ‘Great power’ and ‘great grace’ was upon the apostles. The apostles were **preaching Christ. Jesus is the DOOR to the community.**
- vii. **At the apostles’ feet** Acts 4:34-37 reveal the level of giving and sacrificial generosity of these disciples. The people were prepared to lay their money “*at the apostles’ feet*” and allow them to distribute it. This is a principle of God’s word.

Daily – They Did Not Cease!

“*And daily in the temple, and in every house, they did not cease teaching and preaching Jesus the Christ*” Acts 5:42.

Until we return to the biblical model and practice of preaching and teaching Jesus the Christ in every house that will receive us and in public places such as the temple, we will not see the life and witness of the glory of Christ Jesus that we long for.

We still only give partial approval to church in the home. Most churches forbid the breaking of bread in the home and yet this is the right place for the breaking of bread. It is neither biblical nor practical to break bread in large congregations. Despite saying this, I have in South India, seen a congregation of over 12,000 people receive the communion in the congregational meeting – it was done efficiently; everyone was included; it was marvellous.

The work of the Gospel is continuous, public, and from house to house, daily.

The elders of the church in the city work in unity to plant the church in every friendly house. There needs to be a real soul-winning, apostolic house church in the midst of every locality, in every city,

town and rural area, so that every soul is contacted and impacted by the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

A testimony

In early 2003 I was in a city overseas and on the Sunday, I preached in four Sunday meetings. The first was in a suburban area, which was quite poor. It was a humble house church meeting which included the breaking of bread. Three souls were saved in that meeting.

I led them to the Lord before I ministered communion. Then they were able to receive the communion.

The next meeting was held in the upstairs of a large house which has been set apart for meetings of the church.

There was a regular Sunday meeting in this place with communion. No one came for salvation. The third meeting was held in a small church building. It was packed. There was no communion and no one for salvation. The fourth was an evening meeting in a Pentecostal church building, with 3-400 present. Again, there was no communion and no one for salvation.

The first meeting was held in a humble house in a humble street and unsaved folks were drawn into the meeting. The breaking of bread in such a meeting is easy, natural, intimate and powerful to save as we experienced. This is the biblical breaking of bread in the house, with the apostle present to teach the word in the house.

Multiplication

Those pastors who lead congregations which meet on Sundays in dedicated buildings have the potential to plant multiple house churches. This means training leaders and then dividing the congregation to meet in smaller meetings – from house to house. I am not referring to cell-groups or home-groups here but to the actual planting and establishment of the church in the house.

Such a work is truly apostolic and must be done for the effective witness of the Gospel to every creature. **This is the Biblical way to go: the planting of churches in every friendly house.**

Part Two

THE CHURCH THAT MEETS IN HOUSES

The church of the New Testament is the church that meets in houses. The apostles taught the doctrines of Christ in the house meetings as believers gathered daily. There were public ministries but they were mainly for evangelism.

There is the use of a public hall as in the case of Paul in Ephesus where he gathered the disciples for training, but **there is no ‘dedicated church building’**.

According to the New Testament Scriptures the church in the house is the church in its primary and ongoing expression.

The actual house to house meetings of the saints (believers) is the only expression of church found in the New Testament except for public preaching and testimony in places like Solomon’s porch (**Acts 5:12**), and apostolic teaching schools such as the school of Tyrannus in Ephesus (**Acts 19:9-10**).

The Purpose of Ministry in the House

Stated clearly and simply: **the purpose of ministry in the house is to plant the Biblical church and to release it to function.**

This is the way of ministry that Jesus instructed the seventy witnesses in **Luke 10**; they were to stay in the house of the man of peace [a friendly house, a house where they were received], heal the sick and preach the kingdom of God.

They were not to go from house to house but rather Jesus’ expectation was that the sick and the lost would be drawn to the house where the ministers of the gospel were (**Lu.10:1-9**)

THE CHURCH IN THE HOUSE IN THE BOOK OF ACTS

There are clear references in the book of **Acts** to the church in the house. In **Acts 1:12-26** the hundred and twenty were waiting in the upper room, continuing in prayer until the Holy Spirit came – **they were in a house.**

In **Acts 2:42-47** after the public preaching in the street on the day of Pentecost, three thousand souls were baptised and added to the one hundred and twenty believers. Where did the 3,120 meet?

Acts 2:46 *“they continued daily with one accord, breaking bread from house to house.”* **They met in multiple houses.** One can imagine that the upper room of **Acts 1** probably held few more than 120. Many other believers opened their houses, inviting numbers of the new converts, who were already baptised and had received the Holy Spirit on the day they believed, to come to the house meetings where the apostles were teaching daily. As well, there were daily prayer meetings in the temple precincts, specifically Solomon’s porch (**Acts 5:12**).

Acts 4:23&31: after Peter and John were released by the Sanhedrin *“they went to their own companions”*, [we can assume they went to a house] and prayed to the Lord about their situation and asking the Lord for boldness and for signs and wonders.

Acts 5:42 *“And daily in the temple, and in every house, they did not cease teaching and preaching Jesus the Christ.”*

Acts 9:11-19 Saul was *“in the house of Judas in a street called Straight”*. Paul was healed, filled with the Holy Spirit and baptised by Ananias in a house.

Acts 9:33-34: Peter raised the paralysed man **from his bed** – we assume he was in a house.

Acts 10:24-48: Cornelius gathered all his relatives and friends together in his house to hear Peter share the message of Jesus Christ. *“While Peter was still speaking these words, the Holy Spirit fell upon all who heard the word”* v44.

Peter then commanded them to be baptised [they must have had some water in the house – maybe a Roman bath!] and he stayed with them in the house for a few days to minister.

Acts 12:12 when the angel delivered Peter from the prison he went to **the house of John Mark** *“where many were gathered together praying”*.

Acts 16:15-40 Lydia came to salvation through the preaching of Paul and as soon as she was baptised, she persuaded Paul and his team to *“come to my house and stay”*. The **church in Philippi was planted in Lydia’s house**. That is where the church met. When Paul and Silas were released from the prison they went back to Lydia’s house where they saw the brethren (v.40).

In **Acts 16:33-34**, the Philippian jailer and his family were all saved and immediately baptised; he then brought the apostles into his house and set food before them. Again, the function or conduct of church life was in the house.

Acts 18:7-8 in Corinth, Paul initially testified in the Jewish synagogue but when opposition arose, *“he departed from there and entered the house of a certain man named Justus, who worshiped God, whose house was next door to the synagogue. Then Crispus, the ruler of the synagogue, believed on the Lord with all his household.”* Often in the New Testament evangelism reached whole households; this was because the ministry of the gospel came into the house!

Acts 20:20 Paul testifies that in Ephesus he *“taught publicly and from house to house”*. He was speaking to the elders from the church in Ephesus. When Paul was in Ephesus he taught publicly, daily, in the school of Tyrannus. But the church met in houses and so in the evenings Paul ministered from house to house. The school of Tyrannus is the model for apostolic training schools.

Acts 21:8 when Paul and his company came to Caesarea, he *“entered the house of Philip the evangelist, who was one of the seven, and stayed with him”*. House meetings happened automatically and after many days Agabus the prophet arrived from Judea and ministered in the house (v.10-14).

Acts 28:30-31 *“Then Paul dwelt two whole years in his own rented house, and received all who came to him, preaching the kingdom of God. And teaching the things which concern the Lord Jesus Christ with all confidence, no one forbidding him.”*

Paul had spent two years teaching in the apostolic school in Ephesus, but he is just as committed to teaching the apostles' doctrine in his own rented house for two years. This is the last picture we have of the great apostle Paul in the Scripture and he is practicing church in the house.

We have looked at all the direct references to the church meeting and functioning in the house in the book of Acts. There are many other indirect references because **all the normal meetings happened from house to house. This includes the Word of God being taught by the apostles.**

MINISTRY IN THE HOUSES IN THE EPISTLES

Romans 16:5 "*Likewise the church in their house* [Priscilla and Aquila's house]"

v.10 "*Greet those of the household of Aristobulus*".

v.11 "*Greet those who are of the household of Narcissus who are in the Lord.*"

v.14 "*Greet Asyncritus ... and the brethren who are with them.*"

v.15 another group of saints are together with some brethren Paul knows by name.

Paul had not been to Rome at the time he wrote the letter, but he knows '*brethren in a number of households*', '*church in the house*', '*brethren together*'. There are five of these groups mentioned and it is reasonable to believe that they were five house-based fellowships that were part of the church in Rome.

1 Corinthians 16:15 refers to the **household of Stephanus** who "*devoted themselves to the ministry of the saints*". Stephanus is referred to as a minister and a co-worker with Paul. He ministered through the church that was based in his house as well as travelling in ministry. In **v.19** Priscilla and Aquila had a **church in their house** in Ephesus, as well as in Rome later (**Rom.16:5**) and in Corinth earlier.

In **Colossians 4:15** the church is in the **house of Nymphas** [or Nympha]. **Philemon (1-2)** also **hosted and led the church in his house**. He was known for his love and faith and his refreshing ministry to the saints (**4-6**) and to Paul the apostle (**20-22**).

As in the book of **Acts** there are only some specific references to the churches being in the houses. However, there are no references in either the book of **Acts** or the **Epistles** to the church meeting customarily anywhere else. **It is time to return to New Testament Christianity, to follow the apostolic pattern clearly set in the Scriptures.**

As it is Written

The apostles in the Bible, minister publicly and from house to house. The public ministry was generally evangelism but included speaking in the synagogues regularly in the early years of the church and also in the Temple precincts. Prayer meetings were held in the Temple area. However, **the normal life of the church was lived out [conducted] in the homes, from house to house.**

The new converts that came from public evangelism were received into the church; that church met in many homes. The three thousand saved on the day of Pentecost were added to the hundred and twenty, and met in many homes daily, and were growing daily *“the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved” Acts 2:47.*

The only mention of the venue of church meetings as such in the Scriptures is in houses. Yes, public witness happened in a variety of places, but never does the Bible suggest that the church met in these places for the conduct of normal church life.

Normal church life, which is the ‘conduct’ or function of the church was undisputedly in the houses. So why is there such confusion today? Often when I tell another minister about the development of ministry in the house and the formation of house churches, the comment is, *‘Oh, when the group grows, they will be able to get a building.’* No, that is not our goal.

The goal is the multiplication of disciples who meet in houses to hear the apostles’ doctrine, to fellowship together including the meeting of each other’s needs, to break **bread regularly** – at least weekly but preferably daily and to **pray together** to discover God’s purpose day by day; to nurture the new converts and to disciple the believers.

THE CONDUCT OF MINISTRY IN THE HOUSE

In the church that meets in the house there is:

- **prayer, enabling the lost to find Jesus, praise, and worship,**
- **fellowship and sharing,**
- **apostolic doctrine – leading to sound doctrine practiced, revelation understood, and grace received.**
- **many opportunities for ministry – signs and wonders, preaching and teaching.**

All of these are illustrated in Acts 2:42-47:

Acts 2:42 “And they continued steadfastly in the apostle’s doctrine and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in prayers.”

Five-fold ministry happened in the house.

The apostles came to the meetings and taught the doctrine; the saints shared fellowship, broke bread and prayed together.

These four aspects are the key works of the church functioning in the house. Yet, even quite mature believers are continually made dependent on the ministry team of the local church – never delegated to function in ministry at home breaking bread, praying together, studying the Word and functioning in the gifts of the Holy Spirit.

v.43 “Then fear came upon every soul, and many wonders and signs were done through the apostles.” There was evidence of the kingdom of God in the midst. The sick were healed; miracles were happening in the houses.

v.44-45 “Now all who believed were together, and had all things in common, and sold their possessions and goods, and divided them among all, as anyone had need.”

The fellowship that develops out of house-based ministry leads to a deep level of sharing. Every member in the group is known and valued; individual needs are shared openly and prayed about; help, support and provision flow as the Lord leads.

v.46 “So continuing daily with one accord ... breaking bread from house to house, they ate their food with gladness and simplicity of heart.” There was the opportunity for believers to meet daily in

open friendly ways, to share meals together and to share opportunities of experiencing the Lord through the breaking of bread. The breaking of bread in the Scripture from its inception at the Last Supper was always in the context of the meal. Today as the church returns to the house meeting the breaking of bread can once again be part of the fellowship meal and take on greater meaning.

v.47 *“Praising God and having favour with all the people. And the Lord added to the church daily those who were being saved.”* The place of praise and worship is in the house meeting.

The house-based church is in ‘natural’ contact with neighbours and all who live in the vicinity of the house church. The early Christians had *‘favour with all the people’* – this means they were popular and well thought of. Neighbours are easily included into house church.

The Testimony of Scripture is Clear: the New Testament church met in houses. The church was planted in every friendly house. **Acts 5:42** *“And daily in the temple and in every house, they did not cease teaching and preaching Jesus the Christ.”* In **Luke 10**, Jesus sent the witnesses out two by two into every city and place where He was about to go. He instructed them to find a friendly house and minister there, healing the sick and preaching the kingdom of God.

The Goal is:

- multiple church plants: a church in the home of every Christian family; a church in the house of every Christian household; a church on every floor of every apartment block & every office block; a church in every street; a church in every farming district.
- for the gospel to be fully preached; for the Great Commission to be fulfilled; for the church to be prepared for the Lord’s return.
- Therefore, there needs to be a Bible based, soul winning, Holy Spirit empowered church, in the midst of every group of people. Then every soul is contacted and impacted by the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

Ministering from House to House

For some years now the Lord has given us a focus of **planting the church “in every friendly house”**. The Lord’s instructions to the seventy that He sent out in **Luke 10** was to find a house where they were received and to heal the sick and preach the gospel in that house. In the book of **Acts** and in various places in the **Epistles** we find references to the church meeting in the house.

In fact, houses were the main and even the only meeting place of the church. Dedicated church buildings did not appear until well after the New Testament writing time. It is difficult for us in the modern era to comprehend how the church operated initially because the general format of church meetings of today is so different. However **there has been an ongoing restoration of the church in the house.**

Some years ago, a team of us were taken by an apostolic pastor who is based in a small country town to a total of six localities [one city, four towns and a farming property].

The meetings were with one person on the farm and a gathering of 15 was the largest meeting. However, in every place the Lord released His word specifically and there was an anointing of revelation and understanding. We were amazed to see the Lord working as we went **‘from house to house’ sharing the word of God and ministering to the needs of God’s people.**

We see **the outworking of revival** in our day, not at this time with lots of people being saved, but rather the saints having **life-changing experiences** as we speak of the apostolic revelation and the spirit of sonship. God is enabling us to minister to individuals and small groups, who are **learning to ‘be the church’**, who are no longer dependent upon a structure or a hierarchy or a set order of service, but who are experiencing the leading of the Holy Spirit, who are taking responsibility to be disciples, to grow in the knowledge of the word.

**In all of this, God is preparing a people
for the influx of many in the future.**

A MODEL FOR THE PLANTING OF MANY CHURCHES, THROUGH THE APOSTOLIC MINISTRY

For those ministers who have functioning cell church, please be aware that you have the opportunity to plant many churches. It is not a major change, to actually launch each cell into being a house church. If you presently have numerous cells meeting as part of your local church, start to think of church plants; that each cell can actually become the church planted and functioning in a locality, in all aspects of church life and ministry.

1. Review your current cell structure. Often a local church has cells based on a particular interest group, such as, single young people, married couples. However, the church is to consist of families together in the Lord.

Therefore, there will need to be a restructuring of the groups to become genuine expressions of the church. The obvious way to plant churches, is in geographic areas, involving all ages and the whole family together.

2. Any functioning house church needs an elder/pastor to be responsible for the meetings and other aspects of the church community, including practicing pastoral care. The elder for each house church needs to be appointed/commissioned by the apostolic leadership.

The major role of the elder is to continue the work of 'making disciples'.

The elders need to have been trained as disciples, so that they know what to do.

The elders are to continue in submission to, and be accountable to, the apostolic leadership.

3. Initially the newly emerging house churches may be meeting only during the week, and all the brethren gather together in the meeting place that the local church already has, on Sundays.

However, this can vary as some of the house churches may be far away from the main meeting place and the gospel would be better served if they met in their own locality. Then the

gathering of all the brethren together might take place on a monthly basis. When the number of house churches increases in any particular locality, they could then gather together in a combined meeting on a monthly basis in that locality.

Please realise that all of this takes time. Also there needs to be a re-training of ourselves and of all our leaders so that we embrace the Biblical model of the church, that is,

the planting of multiple churches in houses everywhere.

4. The existing mother church and whatever facilities the church has, should begin to function as an apostolic discipleship and training centre, offering study courses, both in the church facility, but also making those study courses available to the house churches, so that all the brethren are able to be discipled in the word of God.

"Who then is a faithful and wise servant, whom His master made ruler over His household, to give them food in due season" **Matt.24:45.**

Some fear that in planting many churches and releasing brethren to function in those churches, that the church founders will lose control of the church that they have raised up, and that their work will come to naught. This is not the case, if the founding pastor/apostle fully comprehends and apprehends the whole issue of multiplication, by planting many churches.

5. Training and commissioning ministers: the role of the apostle especially is to train and raise ministers, setting them in place to function. This is the message of **2Timothy2:2**, *"And the things that you have heard from me among many witnesses, commit these to faithful men [includes women] who will be able to teach others also"*. This is how multiplication takes place, and multiplication has always been God's intention. However, the multiplication is not so much of churches but of disciples. The role of the various house churches is to make disciples, being part of an apostolic ministry.

6. The pattern in Australia: At Shiloh in Toowoomba, we have a Sunday meeting at our centre, where a small congregation

meets. We meet as a 'house church' - sitting in a circle; each member can contribute; different ones are invited to lead worship; present the Lord's Table; share a word, etc.

We also have a number of house churches in the locality of Toowoomba that meet each Sunday.

We have a number of relating house churches further away from Toowoomba and we send out teams to minister to those house churches as we are able.

The Shiloh Base operates as a **discipleship and training centre**:

- ❖ offering **fulltime training for some**.
- ❖ We have **discipleship classes** which are open to all. These classes are offered on two days of the week.
- ❖ As well we offer discipleship and training in a **ministry training school** on Thursdays.
- ❖ We host **various seminars and conferences** from time to time.
- ❖ Twice a year we host **intensive training schools** for a minimum of two weeks. Often the leaders from the regional house churches come to the training schools.

Reasons for making a change from congregational meetings with cell groups, to house churches are:

- to enhance the **accountability of each individual saint to be a contributing member** in the church meeting (**1Cor.14:26**). The meetings of the house church allow for much **greater spontaneity**, because in the smaller group individuals can function in gifts and ministries.
- to encourage each individual saint or family to **take responsibility for the well-being of the other members** of the house church (**Acts 2:44-45**).
- to give to each member **a sense of ownership**: *'this is my church and I am responsible and accountable for its success'*.

Meeting in the smaller groups:

- a) enables individuals to function in giftings and contribute in the meeting

- b) encourages the brethren to begin to care for each other as the whole group operates more like a family
- c) facilitates the raising and training of new leadership by giving ministry experience to the members of the house church.

WHAT IS THE CHURCH?

The church of Jesus Christ is not made up of small independent, unrelated house churches! Nor is it made up of denominationally arranged and governed organizations! Nor is it made up of large Pentecostal and evangelical churches! Nor is it made up of a few glamorous TV ministries! Nor is it made up of ecumenical networks where the word of God is subjugated to the traditions of men and to pragmatic ministry limitations!

The church of Jesus Christ is not known primarily by studying church history even where the historical church may appear to have been successful. **The church of Jesus Christ is known by revelation from the word of God and returning to apostolic teaching and foundations in the word of God.**

The true church is betrothed to Jesus Christ, not to some important human figure in church history or in contemporary ministry. We must honour the bride of Jesus Christ and not meddle with the clear plan of God.

Ephesians 2:19-22 shows us that **the church is founded on the ministries of apostles and prophets**; that **Jesus Christ is the chief cornerstone** and that the whole building of the church is fitted together in Him; and that the church grows world-wide into a holy temple in the Lord, but there are the local meeting places where God is revealed in the spirit to the local members.

Publicly and from house to house – Acts 20:20

The church of the New Testament met publicly and from house to house. Jesus Christ and His Gospel was preached and taught publicly and from house to house.

In the Scripture there are house churches meeting daily and there is public ministry, whether it be in the Temple, the school, the street, before the Council or before the king.

There is the fully authorised gathering of the few, meeting in the house, and there is the fully authorised sending forth of apostles, prophets and evangelists to preach the Gospel and to plant new churches.

There is the ordaining and raising up of pastors and teachers to shepherd and feed the flock of God. There is a blueprint to be followed in leading the church on to perfection: it is found in the Word of God.

Planting the church, growing the church, and maturing the church is the God given ministry of the church. It is not the growth of the local church to be a mega-church; but it is the planting of many fellowships, many churches in the houses. This is the way to permeate the city and the rural areas: many churches in many localities.

We have already seen in **Acts 2:42-47** that the early church met from house to house, and gives a wonderful picture of the early church in operation. The newly baptised believers (**Acts 2:41**), "*Continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in prayers*" v.42.

Every house church is to focus on these four-primary works. This is the proper functioning of the church. The church is to be devoted to the apostles' doctrine; the church is to function in fellowship, including the giving of tithes and offerings; the church is to break bread regularly and remember Jesus as He instructed (**1Cor.11:23-26**); the church is to pray together, and especially to pray for the nation and the government.

The Bible says that the early church broke bread "*daily from house to house*" (**Acts 2:46**). Often the Table of the Lord, which is the breaking of bread, is neglected in churches and yet the breaking of bread should be a primary practice of the church whenever it meets.

CHURCH GROWTH: THE BIBLE WAY

Do not look to man's tradition and worldly methods. Follow the commands of the Lord Jesus and the example of the disciples He trained. They preached and taught the Gospel publicly and from

house to house. They proclaimed Jesus of Nazareth to be the Son of God. They proclaimed Him to be the Messiah. And they were successful in seeding the Roman Empire with the Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ.

We do not need to look any further than the commands of the Lord Jesus in the Gospels and being led by the Holy Spirit, preaching and teaching Him publicly and from house to house. The church will be planted! Multiple churches will be planted! Church growth is all about the new converts being nurtured and disciplined and growing up in all aspects into Christ.

Seven steps to fruitful ministry

There are **seven steps to fruitful ministry** in obeying the Great Commission and establishing New Testament churches.

- 1. Prayer** - leading to witnessing and evangelism to family, friends, workmates and neighbours.
- 2. Evangelism** - sharing the gospel to the ones that God puts in our way because we have been praying. Those who believe should receive baptism (**Acts 2:38-41 & Acts 8:12**)
- 3. Nurture** - feeding the milk of the word to the new converts that have been saved; knowing and teaching the foundation principles of the oracles of God (**Heb.5:12-6:3, 1Pet.2:2**)
- 4. Discipling** - Jesus said "*Go and make disciples*" (**Matt.28:19**). The key component is teaching the word of God (**Jn.8:31-32**).
- 5. Training and equipping** - raising ministers, giving them practical training in all aspects of ministry, and especially how to function as the overseer and shepherd of the flock (**Acts 20:28, 1Pet.5:2-4**).
- 6. Church planting** - which is the result of making disciples (**Acts 14:21-23**).
- 7. Emergence of new ministries** - as the disciples grow and develop and are giving opportunity to preach and teach and minister, we recognise the five-fold ministers of **Ephesians 4:11** being raised among us.

Discipleship

The Great Commission is to make disciples (**Matthew 28:18-20**). It is time for every church leader to reconsider why we do what we do. Are we obeying the Lord Jesus Christ, or are we following church tradition? Do we assume that what everyone else does and has done in the past is what we should do? Or are we willing to be part of the great restoration that the Lord Jesus Christ is bringing to pass to enable His church to be built according to the apostolic pattern in the Scriptures, enabling the church to become the glorious body of Christ in the earth.

The goal that God has for His people is for every member of His body to grow to maturity. The work of the ministry (**Eph.4:11-13 & Col.1:28-29**), is to bring the people of God to fully function in maturity in the church. To do this there needs to be a committed approach to bringing every believer to maturity and this is the work of making disciples.

Nurturing new believers

Peter says we all need the pure milk of the word (**1Pet.2:2**), that is, the basic doctrines of salvation, forgiveness, baptism and being filled with the Holy Spirit.

The writer to the **Hebrews** lists six foundational doctrines that every believer needs to be founded in (**Hebrews 6:1-2**). The instruction concerning the need for foundations comes in the context that the writer expected every Hebrew believer to have grown to maturity and be able to teach the word of God (**Heb.5:12**).

Therefore, we need to give primary attention to founding and grounding every believer in the following six principles of the faith.

- 1) Repentance from dead works
- 2) Faith toward God
- 3) Doctrine of baptisms
- 4) Laying on of hands
- 5) Resurrection of the dead
- 6) Eternal Judgement

[Please note that there are teaching materials available concerning these six principles]

Discipling every believer

Giving the milk of the word to the believers is the first step, but then all the believers need to become committed disciples who continue in the word. *"If you abide [continue] in My word, you are My disciples indeed. And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free"* **Jn.8:31-32**.

In **Acts 14:21-23**, the work of the newly appointed apostles, Paul and Barnabas (**Acts 13:1-4a**), is summarised as follows:

- a) Preach the gospel
- b) Make many disciples
- c) Travel from city to city [place to place]
- d) Strengthening the souls of the disciples
- e) Exhorting the disciples to continue in the faith
- f) Warning them that *"we must through many tribulations enter the kingdom of God"*.
- g) Appointing elders in every church

Discipleship is bringing the believers who have received the milk of the word into a disciplined study of the word of God and walking in an accountable way in the Lord, coming to understand the eternal purpose of God.

Jesus took at least three years to make disciples and then to train those disciples for ministry. We follow the same pattern at Shiloh. We conduct discipleship leading to ministry, over a three-year period. And it is in the third year that we begin to train the disciples for the work of the ministry. The first two years are devoted to grounding the disciples in the doctrine of the word, and bringing them to a place of maturity whereby they understand the mysteries (**1Cor.2:6-7 & Eph.3:2-11 & Col.1:25-27**).

This work of discipleship is to continue in the house churches. The house church elders will need to be disciplined and trained by the apostle in the home base [the mother church] so that they are able to continue the work of discipleship from house to house.

[Numerous study manuals are available in Spanish, English, Swahili, and other languages that help facilitate the making of disciples.]

The issue of Finance

A vital part of true Christian fellowship is the willingness and the commitment to give. The giving of tithes and offerings is vital to the continuing life and function of the church. The responsibility for the distribution and use of finances is firstly with the apostolic leadership and secondly with the appointed elders in the various churches, as authorised by the apostle.

Here in Australia, our related house churches give of their tithes and offerings, which are received in the house churches, to the apostolic base in Toowoomba. However, when there are legitimate costs in the functioning of the house church, then the house church elder is authorised to use some of the funds received. Some groups function autonomously and tithe of their income to RMA.

THE GROWTH OF THE INDIVIDUAL HOUSE CHURCH

As the brethren meet in houses, and as new believers are added, the group may become too large for the house. The house church is a place where others are trained and raised up in leadership. As this happens the group can divide and another house meeting can be planted.

House based church meetings give ministers-in-training the opportunity to lead meetings and to begin to take pastoral responsibility for the members of the group, and of course to teach the word of God.

The multiplication of ministry

One of the greatest joys of planting the church in the houses, is to see the emergence of new ministries. Every house meeting needs a teacher or a preacher; every house meeting needs someone to lead the praise and worship, someone to lead the Table of the Lord, and various ones to pray. As well there is the opportunity for various ones to make contributions according to **1Corinthians 14:26**. There is also opportunity for sharing of testimonies.

In larger congregational meetings, only a designated few can function in the meetings. When the church meets in the houses, there are multiple opportunities for every member to learn to contribute and function.

Continuing from house to house

The first church continued daily, “*breaking bread from house to house*” (Acts 2:46). Paul testified that he taught “*publicly and from house to house*” (Acts 20:20).

We have shown the many references to church in the house in the Book of Acts and in the Epistles. We have not studied the many references to Jesus’ ministering from house to house in the Gospels.

We urge you to rethink the functioning of the church: is it meant to be primarily a congregational meeting, with a few leaders controlling the meeting, with little participation of the members of the congregation?

Or is it meant to be meetings happening from house to house, with all the family involved and many opportunities for all the members to participate, including children, with reliance upon the leading of the Holy Spirit and His empowerment.

If we have house churches in every locality then the whole community can be contacted and impacted by the Gospel.

Pastors of functioning congregational churches, begin to dream. If you have 300 regular attendees, with some training you could plant 15 house churches! Then you would be the pastor/overseer of 15 churches, not one. Then you would have 15 preachers, 15 worship leaders, 15 different ones leading the Lord’s Table. You would have whole families getting involved, no longer separating children and expecting some specialist to disciple our children, but rather teaching our parents how to disciple their own children.

Then the word of the Lord would grow and increase!

An introduction to House Churches

Not going to Church! But being the Church!

Since we began Revival Ministries in 1998 we have been committed to planting the church in the house. We knew from the beginning that 'we are the church' and the Lord showed us to practice the 'first works' according to Acts 2:42. We did this everywhere we went, encouraging meetings in the house.

However, it was becoming increasingly clear that, according to the New Testament Scriptures, Church in the house is the Church in its primary and ongoing expression. So, as the Holy Spirit led we broke the congregation at our home base into smaller house Churches in 2007.

www.revivalministries.org.au

Email: rma@revivalministries.org.au

