

beginning thoughts:

This simple church brochure is designed for Jesus-centered & Spirit-led communities that revolve around three essential *norms* of expression: *rhythm of presence, movement of renewal, and culture of blessing.*

Simple churches share life together through prayer & deep conversation, over meals, in play & recreation, & through adventure in serving those in need. Simple churches actively seek the care of the last, the lost, and the least in our world – always with a gracious invitation to *join us if you'd like & yet whatever your decision we will still treat you with dignity & respect . . . we will treat you as Jesus himself.*

And while this brochure does not place an emphasis on restricted religiosity as typified by many fundamentalist expressions of religion it does have a central focus on following and imitating the practices & teachings of Jesus & the rhythms of the Holy Spirit – envisioning the renewed reality of a people unleashed to collectively utilize their gifts & talents not toward service of money, consumerism, & self but in service of the Kingdom of God that Jesus spoke of constantly.

This begs the question, *do we need institutional religion at all?* One follower of Jesus wrote that good religion is essentially *taking care of the disadvantaged & the poor.* We resonate with that sentiment—but unfortunately much of religious culture is about *separating* people based on dogma & ideology. And as history has shown these separations often spiral toward hatred, exclusion, violence, exploitation, slavery, & even genocide. Therefore, we applaud and find commonality in those religious & ideological expressions that do indeed take care of those in need of water, food, shelter, health-care, clothing, & love. And we find ourselves praying for the shalom & the gospel of God to rest on people enslaved to ideologies & religious expressions that promote hatred over reconciliation & selfishness over selflessness.

This brochure is a template to help your simple church find its own unique expression within its own unique context. Each simple church will look vastly different from another simple church but the commonalities of *presence, renewal, and blessing as Jesus-centered & Spirit-led communities* will be rather apparent.

a rhythm of presence
a movement of renewal
a culture of blessing

simple
churches
of local & global shalom

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First Questions: What is a simple church & when is it a movement? Simple churches are:

- **Small** evolving & deepening communities of friends who are committed to being Jesus-centered & Spirit-led in their life together for shalom & gospel both inwardly & outwardly.
- **Where all participate** & put their best talents/gifts to the service of the Kingdom of God - high levels of personal & collective discipleship are occurring.
- **Living** by norms characterized by Jesus & his followers as indicated in the Scriptures (we label these norms as Rhythm of Presence, Movement of Renewal, & Culture of Blessing).
- **Movements** when one church seeks the Spirit's leading to creatively grow into two or three simple churches because new followers of Jesus are emerging.

Second Questions: Who is willing to join a simple church movement that expresses shalom & gospel? Who isn't? Here's the thing: you won't know until you start asking. This is simply a process to help guide you - begin by:

- **Cultivating** a culture of radical & open hospitality as practiced by Jesus & his followers. This is the lifeblood of simple church practice.
- **Praying** that the Spirit leads you to people who are willing to jump in with you.
- **Listing** some of the people in your network of friends & contacts who have a strong desire to engage in both inward renewal & outward acts of shalom & gospel.
- **Talking** to them about a bit of your vision for beginning a simple church in your area that is geared toward deep friendship as well as being an action-based movement of renewal & faith formation.
- **Giving them** a brochure to read over & to pass on to others.
- **Noting** that not everyone will want to join you but some might give you names of friends whom they suspect may want to join you.
- **Keeping in mind** that not everyone needs to believe exactly the same - in fact, alternative points of view can be vital when expressed in a spirit of grace.
- **Realizing** that it is the **willingness & commitment** to belong to a community of people involved in a movement of shalom & gospel that is much more crucial than one's knowledge-base.
- **Being wary** of individuals who seem to live more by their egos & their own agendas & less by an openness to the Spirit of God - regardless of their religious or ideological commitments.

Third Questions: What do these norms look like? What do they do? Keep in mind that norms are not designed to be hard & fast rules but are rather expressions of what good simple churches are & do. The **NORMS:**

Rhythm of Presence Norm:

1. **Be present to God.** Meditate/pray/dream together with the presence of God (what is Jesus/Spirit saying to us & leading us to? This occurs both individually & collectively).
2. **Be present to one another.** Love one another. Are we moving toward deeper faith & contentedness? What's helping & what's hindering? Pray for healing where need be. Constantly encourage high levels of discipleship.
3. **Read & imitate** Jesus' practices & teachings from the teachings of Scripture & learn to disentangle him from those religious expressions that are not in alignment with the characteristics of gospel & shalom (Matthew, Mark, Luke, & John are the books in Scripture to consistently read & return to).
4. **Practice** intentionally & subversively blessing people around you with your presence - including colleagues, strangers & enemies. Play together, laugh together, cry together, learn together, serve together, adventure together.

Movement of Renewal Norm:

1. **Agree** to locally & globally unleash the mystery & beauty & adventure of shalom & gospel together.
2. **Live** into creative rhythms of loving & serving neighbors, strangers, & enemies regularly.
3. **Join** one of the many organizations already at work bringing clean water, food, clothing, medication, justice, etc. to the poorest of the world & seek ways to unleash & bring awareness to those movements in localized expressions (Blood Water Mission, Not For Sale, Soles4Souls, Intl Justice Mission, Doctors w/o Borders—or local organizations with similar impulses for renewal).
4. **Invite** others to join your simple church in these actions without expecting anything from them in return.
5. **Faith** is risk.

Culture of Blessing Norm:

1. **Always** seek the image of God in the other.
2. **Seek** to be creative agents of blessing above the larger culture of cursing. Live into collective action toward local & global people groups in need
3. **When** wronged, slighted, or grieved seek reconciliation & forgiveness over & above vengeance, retribution, and/or apathy.
4. **When** religious, ideological, lifestyle differences arise in relationships - always seek to discuss in a lively but gracious & prayerful manner.

Final Thoughts: Mission together. Eat together. Laugh together. Dream/Pray together. Faith together. Life together. Other thoughts to consider:

Constantly place Jesus as the head of your church & seek always to be led by the Spirit. Pray together. Meditate. Have times of communal silence. Eat meals together & dream about what could be. Then act on it.

Read from the Torah or the Tanakh or from the Gospels or the Epistles & other texts that point in the direction of the Kingdom of God. Wrestle with the texts yes. But also agree to live into the wisdom discovered there. Knowledge of the text is good & necessary but without enlivened practice it doesn't mean much. **Know** that beliefs & deep friendship are formed & forged by action done with one another more quickly than simply holding meetings together.

All participate. All find ways to put their talents & passions & insights to use. All are vital members & must seek ways to contribute & live into their God-given passions. Avoid the one leader mentality. Switch it up. Administrators are as needed as teachers. Artists are as needed as activists. Etc. Introverts learn to converse - extroverts learn to listen. Some are apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some shepherds, some teachers, etc. (identify gifts, strengths, and roles in each other).

Resist monotony & relentless routine. Utilize art as well as analysis. Engage in the larger culture. Film, literature, art, essays, blogs, etc. can all help growth in faith. Develop a theology of discovery & unexpected surprise as crucial to faith formation. Develop a theology of 'good death' - know that dying to certain things are central to living into better rhythms of faith.

Rest & retreat are extremely important to moving away from a culture of busyness.

Not everything your simple church does will always work. Failing is important & necessary in deep faith formation.

Need to always be in a house? No. Could be an apartment, a restaurant, a café, a park, the beach, a pub—of course your setting will determine some of your rhythms (e.g. singing in café may annoy more than bless or it may not - it really depends on the context you're in).

Need to sing? If that is how you are being led—then of course. No musicians? Get creative and use mp3 playlists and sing. Or visit other worship services in order to bless. Compose your own music. Don't limit the promptings of the Spirit.

What about teaching or sermons? If you're being led to sermons then access the thousands of world-class pastor/teacher/speakers online. But don't limit what the Spirit can teach you through group discussions with savvy facilitation. Trying to avoid heresy? Stick to the Way of Jesus in the Scriptures & pray. Stickier issues? Pray & seek wisdom from wiser types.

Communion & baptisms should become a consistent expression of your simple church.

Live into friendships that practice smart conflict management, humble confrontation, & bold forgiveness.

Start small. Dream big. Join one of the thousands of organizations already at work bringing clean water, food, clothing, medication, justice, etc. to the poorest of the world & seek ways to unleash those movements in localized expressions - and/or join a local renewal organization with similar impulses. And they don't have to be faith-based organizations.

Find & create ways to play & adventure together - parties, concerts, camping, etc. are just as important as service work.

Invite others consistently & graciously. Be open to all-comers but simple churches of more than 12 or 15 may tend to limit effective inward renewal & outward movement.

Always practice radical hospitality while cultivating the art of being both street-wise & innocent in the same breath. Not all people will join your simple church. Graciously discern wrongful motivations in people (developing a list of questions & interviewing certain people beforehand over coffee or tea can save time & stress for all involved). Point to other church expressions if there doesn't seem to be a fit.

Pray into creative ways of empowering the creation of new disciples who enliven & create new simple churches.

Always seek to center your life-together around Jesus & faithfully move into the rhythms of the Spirit.