

Community Bible Church

Frequently Asked Questions

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1. What is a Housechurch?

Although it goes by many names (e.g. Housechurch, simple church, open church, organic church, etc.), it is simply a group of people getting together with Christ as their center, and the Bible as the ultimate authority. These groups can gather anywhere--homes, workplaces, coffee shops, anywhere that people naturally gather!

"Where two or three are gathered in My name, there I am, in the midst of them." -Jesus

Housechurch (h-ous' chur-ch') n.. 1. A church that meets in a house 2. A home-base assembly of believers 3. Whenever two or more Christians gather to fulfill the scriptural commands for the church (the one-another commands) and they decide to meet in a house.

Housechurches are seen throughout the book of Acts and in the NT. They are consistent with way that Jesus worked with His Disciples. It also appears to be the best place for people to learn how to love one-another and God, to grow in faith, to learn from each-other and to seek to learn how to live-out the "one-another" commands for the Church. We have chosen to call these groups Housechurches following the pattern of the early church. A Housechurch is usually a group of no more that 15 persons.

2. How Did CBC Get Involved With Housechurches?

There are some who get involved with the Housechurch movement as a reaction to what they see lacking in the church culture around them. We started from a different standpoint.

We moved to a plurality of elders around 1996 from a single pastor model. That is a story in itself. We had small groups and felt that they were going very well. As a matter of fact, we saw them as the primary way in which people got connected and supported one another. We wanted to make sure we had a Biblical basis for promoting small groups. As we studied the Word, we found that small groups were integral to the early church but they called them churches. As we examined it more closely, we started seeing some differences between what we were doing in our small groups and what the early church did. We came to the conclusion that there was more than just a different name involved.

The very definition of most small groups (from denomination info., books, and other church literature) usually communicates that the small group is not a church. We found many small group goal and purpose statements from a variety of denominations but they all made it clear that their small groups were not churches. We found this strange. We also observed that the goal and purpose statements small groups used in our research purposely targeted only a portion of what we considered to be all that should be found in a church. After much prayer and dialog, we decided to elevate our small groups to churches. This is what scripture called them. What ever the Bible said a church should be and do, we applied to our small groups and called them Housechurches.

3. What Makes CBC Different?

Well, you would start to see differences by what we do not do. We do not currently have any youth programs. That is popular in our culture. We encourage fathers to be in charge of their youth. So each father is a youth pastor. It has been very good for us and the fathers are excited about raising strong and Godly children. We do not have professional musicians. There are four teams who take turns leading the time of praise. The emphasis is not on having a polished morning service attempting to attract visitors. We want to be faithful to the Word and be obedient to how He has gifted us. We do not have "a" preacher (as in a single person who is viewed as the preacher). Each person in the fellowship is taught and encouraged to preach the gospel to all creation. The gathered teaching is handled by a team of teachers/preachers with one of the elders doing most of the teaching.

4. How does a Housechurch differ from a small group Bible study?

Most Bible study groups exist primarily, and not surprisingly, to study the Bible or some other area of Christian living. And while relationships may develop in a study group and members may begin caring for each other in practical ways, these activities are secondary to learning and life development. In the Housechurch, Bible discussion is blended with other shared life experiences to achieve the primary goal of nurturing a fully-functioning community of believers in and around Jesus Christ.

5. Why are Housechurches not organized along demographic lines?

The Housechurch is a family of families. While some small group ministries organize along demographic lines, one of the unique strengths of the Housechurch is that it pulls together different types of people in one unified community. It is a place where people can relate to others as fellow children of God who are each seeking to know and serve Him better. This unity in the midst of diversity can provide a dynamic testimony to others outside of the group that this is truly a work of God.

6. What is the current status of the ministry of CBC?

We have multiple Housechurches (HC). In most HC's there is at least one Elder. Elders from some HC's form a broader leadership team that oversee a HC network. Teaching, preaching, evangelism, the one anothers, breaking of bread, occur on a regular basis in the HC's.

7. How does the Sunday morning service fit into your understanding?

We gather together every Sunday. Why? We feel it is an excellent time to build a good foundation with Biblical teaching that can reach all at one time. We also worship together in song and enjoy communion. We have testimony time and fellowship time around coffee and snacks. We also meet for prayer.

8. Can I belong to CBC and not attend a Housechurch?

We do not have any form of membership. In the Bible there are no church membership requirements mentioned. The Bible speaks only of the "fellowship" (Konea) relationship. We have fellowship with one another and fellowship with God through Jesus Christ. Your experience of this kind of fellowship will only be as deep as the relationships you build with others who are a part of this fellowship.

We have house churches because we feel they are best way to experience this kind of true fellowship. We also realize that there may be time and logistical barriers that may keep a person from finding a Housechurch that fits their schedule. We hope to work to remove as many of these barriers as possible. We would like you to connect with us in as deep a way as possible. If you can only be with us at our weekly gathering - that's fine we look forward to seeing you there.

From the very beginning, CBC has believed that Housechurches are essential to establishing and maintaining vital relationships with members of our body. Our elders depend on Housechurch leaders to provide day-to-day shepherding of the flock. They know that no small group of men can be actively involved in the lives of each member of the church. However, through Housechurches everyone can be encouraged, taught, and called to a closer walk with God as they share their lives with the members of their small group. In short, to be a member of CBC means being a member of a Housechurch. We will gladly accept any seeker to our assemblies, but everyone desiring to become a member of our body, and to be shepherded by our elders, is asked to commit to active participation in one of the Housechurches of CBC.

9. Is CBC part of a denomination?

Who does CBC fellowship with?

Our intent is to be Christians only, nothing more, nothing less. We therefore consider ourselves "nondenominational," since we do not give ourselves any particular label other than that given to us by God, nor do we align ourselves exclusively with any particular denomination. We are a gathering of Housechurches made up of individuals who have placed our hope in the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus Christ, our Lord. He called us into existence at this place in our community and at this point in time to serve him. We are part of the church that began almost 2,000 years ago on the day of Pentecost, and continues to this day throughout the world. We pursue fellowship with all who have been justified by faith in Christ. This includes those who do not follow a Housechurch model. Although we fellowship with those outside of the Blair County area, our emphasis is those within this geographic area.

10. How do you include children in the Housechurch?

Each group will be different, but our principle is to try to include the kids in everything that is possible. Some have a time of children's songs and a story right there with the adults. Then either have them stay there in the adults meeting coloring or playing quiet games (if there aren't many children) or rotate adults to go to another room with them and play board games, read stories, do crafts, etc while the adult meeting's going on. Some bring them back at the end to share with the adults what they did. Some have prayer time with the kids either with the adults on the front or back end, or on their own if they go to another room. The goal is to make the children a part of the Housechurch family - not something that gets pushed to the side so the adults can do their thing. The variety of possibilities is endless. But the kids are not just a part of the church of the future; they are the church of right now too.

11. How do you handle ceremonial events?

This is yet another area where many house churches differ, but here are some suggestions:

WEDDINGS: Because we meet regularly as a fellowship of churches, those who marry often desire the wedding to include the larger group. Weddings have taken place in a fellowship hall. Since the church is the people not building, weddings can be held anywhere people wish to gather.

BAPTISMS: We can be creative! There are a variety of locations and bodies of water that can be used to be baptized.. We do not believe there are special formal regulations that need to be met for someone to administer baptism.

LORD'S SUPPER: Again, the way that people in different Housechurches handle the Lord's Supper varies widely. Because we meet regularly on Sundays, many share the Lord's Supper once a month during the gathered meeting. Other Housechurches share the Lord's Supper each week in Housechurch. It depends on what the family desire to do.

12. *What does a typical Housechurch meeting look like?*

First and foremost the Housechurch is about obeying Christ's commands for His Church which begins with this: "Love One Another".

Love One Another (John 13:34.35) A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another. By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another."

See Also: John 15:12.13, Romans 12:9.10, 1 Thessalonians 4:9, Hebrews 10:24, 1 John 4:7, 1 John 4:11-12, John 15:17, 1 Thessalonians 3:12, 2 Thessalonians 1:3, 1 Peter 1:22, 1 John 3:11 & 23

The remaining commands are *attitudes* and *action* by which we demonstrate our love for one another.

Attitudes:

Live in Harmony with One Another (Not Judging)

Be Kind to One Another

Have Humility Toward One Another

Actions: Any or all of the following can take place in the "typical" Housechurch.

Welcome One Another

Address One Another with Songs - Submit to One Another

Singing is a common part of our Housechurch

Show Hospitality To One Another

There can also be food

Confess To One Another - Pray For One Another

Prayer is always important as we share with each other and as we lift our concerns to God.

Teach and Admonish One Another

Exhort One Another

There can be teaching and Bible Study. This time is often focused upon the needs and questions of those attending the Housechurch. In addition to teaching truth we are called to encourage others to live out the truth and to live it out in our own lives as an example to others.

Encourage One Another

Do Good To One Another

And we can not forget to care for the needs of those who attend the Housechurch. If we follow every other one another and we forget to care and comfort our message has no meaning.

Comfort One Another Agree With One Another

Serve One Another

Care for One Another

Bear One Another's Burdens

Bear with and Forgive One Another

In short the Housechurch should be about people learning how to love. Any or all of the above items can take place. As we respond to the leading of the Holy Spirit and to the needs of those in the Housechurch we have a great opportunity to share the love of Christ with each other.

13. What do you do for the teens in your Housechurch?

Since high school and junior high school aged youth are still children in their parents' households, we believe that their mentoring and training should be under the direction of each child's parents, particularly the father, if he is a believer. Ephesians 6:4 commands fathers to "not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord." Thus, the primary context of spiritual growth and direction is the family.

Secondly, we encourage teenagers to be an active part of participating and serving in the Housechurches. We have found that many teenagers have felt a high level of acceptance and, consequently, share more openly amongst a trusted spiritual family than they would in many other settings. In addition, teenagers can exercise their natural and spiritual gifts in a family context.

14. How do you Serve? How does "ministry" get done?

Serving God happens as individuals grow in their sensitivity to God's leading and exercise their gifts to build up the body and reach the lost.

In a program driven society, serving is often only understood in the context of participation in programs. Unfortunately, this does not necessarily promote the most accurate understanding of serving God. Programs can often "shield" the believer from the less comfortable ministry calling and keep them from being salt and light to the world.

15. How do I start a Housechurch?

There are many ways! Usually it starts as a small gathering.

16. How long does a Housechurch stay together?

Unlike most other small groups, the Housechurch is designed to be a continuous community of people much like a family. People need a context where long-term relationships can be established with others who know them well and who are committed to them. But just as in a family where children grow up and "leave home" to start their own families, some people rise up in a Housechurch who have the desire and ability to lead their own family of believers, giving birth to new Housechurches.

17. How do you envision the Housechurch model reproducing new churches?

One of the primary roles of a network of Housechurches is to provide a context in which new Housechurches are planted. Thus far, we have mostly planted new Housechurches by splitting large ones in half. However, we are open to trying other methods. In the future, we will watch for opportunities to plant churches where there is a specific need --- or identify a person or persons who have a passion and desire to plant a new Housechurch. These persons will be encouraged, as the time seems to be right, to move ahead and plant a new Housechurch in the area they feel led to do, whether it is a workplace, home, neighborhood or campus.

In the meantime, leaders of new Housechurches are encouraged to fellowship closely with other leaders and with elders of associating Housechurches. This provides a context to teach, mentor and encourage one another so that the vision for the Gospel and the One Another is not lost amongst the other voices in the culture around them.

18. How do you participate in outreach as a network of Housechurches?

It is about relationships. Housechurches have the freedom to connect and to work together ministering in many different ways. All of the houschurches in our fellowship can be involved or just one or two. Housechurches also have the freedom to work with other churches and ministries outside of our fellowship. As we see needs and opportunities we should prayerfully consider what part God would have us take in meeting that need. We should also carefully consider who we should call to help us in that ministry.

19. Is Housechurch an effective way of reaching my community?

Yes. What better way to be a witness to your unsaved friends than to invite them into an environment that is designed to demonstrate the Love of Christ. There are many people will not step into a church building on a Sunday morning that will come into your home. You are living out the Church before your friends and neighbors right where you and they live. The Housechurch gives them the opportunity to ask questions in a non-judgmental setting. Doubts and fears can be expressed and answers can be sought - together. Everyone in the Housechurch can grow together both those who are seeking to know God and those who have a living relationship with Him.

20. What type of leadership or oversight do you have?

We believe that every person is accountable to God directly, and that the destiny of all believers is that they be formed into the image of Christ. (Romans 8) As a result, we encourage the development of all men and women to maturity. As this is happening, some will be qualified, and find themselves prepared, to be leaders in their Housechurch. Although each Housechurch is different, most of them seek to recognize qualified men as elders (based on 1 Timothy 3 and Titus 1). Elders are men God has ordained to guard, govern and direct the affairs of His church.

A church does not need an elder to exist, but we believe that it is healthiest if churches have truly qualified elders who have the commitment and desire to serve the church as a servant leader. Elders primarily set an example, guard and teach. They are to seek out others to share leadership with and operate as a team.

Just as each person is accountable to God, we believe that each Housechurch must also be accountable to Him. No human structure or authority can take the place of the Holy Spirit guiding His people. However, we think it is wise for Housechurches to mutually submit to other churches and to acknowledge the oversight of elders who are responsible for guarding, teaching and protecting a 'cluster' of churches or even a whole community.

21. Does a house church need a leader or pastor?

We believe that you do not need to have a leader in order to be considered a Housechurch. The scriptures teach that God has given leadership for good reasons and that any group that does not have leaders should be actively seeking to appoint elders in that group.

22. How are the Housechurch leaders supported?

Currently, we have no organized meeting to support the Housechurch leaders. There is a strong network of discipleship and friendship that allows the leaders to support one another. In addition, most of the Housechurch leaders serve as elders of the gathering of Housechurches or as a part of the leadership team that helps with vision and administration of the believers who gather together in this broader context.

23. What's your leadership development plan?

We specifically look for men of character who have a hunger to follow God and a willingness to obey His word. Discipleship in character, obedience, and leadership then follow on a personal level. We have held Leadership Development Classes in the past and would like to do that again. However, most leadership training comes through modeling, one-on-one discipleship, practical experience, and discussion. This works itself out practically most often by sharing responsibilities in the Housechurch and reflecting on leadership issues and concerns with the emerging leader.

24. What are the goals of a HC?

Our mission is primarily relational. Our application will involve nurturing and training God's family through discipleship and shepherding care in the context of authentic Christian family churches that meet in homes. We desire to establish Housechurches which nurture and strengthen believers, reach out to non-believers, and ultimately reproduce themselves. The Housechurch does not exist in isolation. The healthy Housechurch meets regularly with the gathered Church.

25. What are the greatest threats to meeting the goals?

A consumer mentality among the member's of Christ's body in the geographic area. When things get tough, many want to look for something that meet's their needs and are less likely to allow God to work through the situation to do His work.

26. How does communion and baptism fit in with the HC?

Communion and baptism are two things that God has instructed us to do as a gathering. These can be done in a larger gathering or in the Housechurch. There are no special requirements on who may facilitate the time.