

DISTRIBUTED CHURCH

**FIELD
GUIDE**



DCFG: V2.5-14.12.24

TABLE OF CONTENTS:

INTRODUCTION

SECTION A: I Am = Us for Them, There

1. Distributed Church Identity
2. Guiding Principles of Distributed Church
3. Distributed Church Definition
4. Who Is My Future Distributed Church?
5. Centering Creeds or Defined Doctrine
6. Unifying Attributes
7. The 4 Distinctives
8. Complex Network of Churches
9. Elements of the Network

SECTION B: Distributing the Church

The Early Church Pattern of Church Planting

Evangelize

- For God So Loved the World
- As You Go, Make Disciples
- Relational Evangelism Principles

Establish

- Baptizing and Teaching Them
- The Process of Establishing a Distributed Church
- The Gathering
- Sacred Practices
- Community

Entrust

- Leaders
- Character of a Leader
- Plurality of Leadership
- Roles and Responsibilities
- Training

Repeat

- Multiplication Process

Marks of a Healthy Church

- Equipping the Saints
- Typology: I Am = Us for Them, There

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES:

- Appendix 1 - Children
- Appendix 2 - Key Questions to Ask in Establishing A Church
- Appendix 3 - Expanded Discussion of the Gathering

INTRODUCTION

At the heart of it, a distributed church is about embracing the ministry and mission of God in the context where you are right now. The web of relationships you already have; the neighborhood where you already live; the place where you already work - these are the people among whom God providentially has placed you. A distributed church is a means to follow God in ways that form those relationships into a spiritual family that reflects His image.

Your first inclination in reading this Field Guide may be to think it is fundamentally about church structure and organization. You'll find the majority of discussion related to churches, so the main purpose would be easy to miss. But at a foundational level what a distributed church is, and how to start one, flows from a deeper purpose: to reflect the image of God in every aspect and relationship in your life.

A distributed church is also about using the gifts God has given you to their fullest potential. Your wiring, your skills and abilities, your perspective, your experience, your relationships, even your struggles are all evidence of your calling. They are indicators of the way God has equipped you for ministry and mission. If you're alive and a follower of Jesus, then you're called to a purpose greater than yourself. Through Christ you have the resources to accomplish that purpose.

But this purpose, while incredibly satisfying to embrace, can be very difficult to prioritize. We want to be a part of something bigger than ourselves, but we balk at leaving our comfort zone. We want to make a difference, but we feel disqualified because of our sin. We long for meaning, but we settle for distraction. But what if, this time, we didn't? What if we stepped forward into something different?

Those who have gone before us are beckoning us forward (including the first century church). All around the world there are groups of people becoming spiritual families whose identity and connection is centered on who God is, what He has done, and what He is doing through them. These groups of people are living out together what Jesus calls the church to be and do in this world. And it is making a difference. Lives are being transformed. People are being cared for. Neighborhoods are improving. The church is growing.

We can follow their example, but it won't be easy. If you're looking for the easy way, then put this down and walk away slowly. This is not the easy way. But, if you've tried those easy ways and have an inkling that you were made for something more, then this might be the way for you to best follow Jesus and be His church.

SECTION A: I Am = Us for Them, There

The first step of our journey is to get our bearings. We need the points by which we can navigate before we set sail on the sea of discovery. Point 1, and our North Star, is the nature of God.

DISTRIBUTED CHURCH IDENTITY

Northland patterns the form of the church after the nature of God. We believe the God who wants to conform us to the image of His Son, wants to conform His church to His own image. So, the identity and structure of a distributed church is the nature of God.

The way we understand the nature of God as revealed to us in Scripture can be expressed in this summary principle: **I Am = Us For Them, There.**

I Am - one God, The God. (Exodus 3:13-22; Deuteronomy 6:4-5; Isaiah 45:5-6, 21-22; The “I Am” statements of Jesus: John 6:36, 8:12, 9:5, 10:9-14; Revelation 1:17)

Us - the trinity, God’s nature is a relationship. (Genesis 1:26; Matthew 28:19; John 1:1-2; Ephesians 4:4-6; 2 Corinthians 13:14; 1 Peter 1:2)

For Them - God is love, and love is always about the other. (Luke 5:32; John 3:16; Romans 5:6-8)

There - Incarnation, God came to us when we could not go to him. (Luke 4:18; John 1:14; Colossians 1:15-20; Ephesians 2:11-22)

In order to fully embody this identity, Northland is becoming a church of distributed churches, a family of spiritual families. More and more the larger congregation of Northland is also comprised of smaller, distributed churches (spiritual families) that are networked together with a common vision, mission, and leadership. These distributed churches meet in homes, offices, clubhouses, and coffee shops for a meal, fellowship, the study of Scripture, prayer, and service (Acts 2:42), while the whole congregation of Northland also regularly combines together each weekend in larger venues for worship and network-wide equipping.

When Northland gathers via one of our weekend worship services, we experience unified teaching that shapes the entire movement of distributed churches. We celebrate who God is, what He has done, and what He is doing through us. We hear of God’s stories told through changed lives. And, we develop our collective and individual ability to think biblically.

A distributed church provides the environment to apply Scripture to our more immediate context, to contribute and participate using our God given gifts, to develop deep relationships between individuals and families, and to spur one another on to love and good deeds. The distributed church also forms the environment that best facilitates bringing the message of hope and truth to those who are not yet included.

Both the large corporate gatherings as well as the smaller distributed churches are vital for accomplishing the Great Commandment and Great Commission. The mobile forces of distributed churches take Jesus out into the communities to serve others and include those not yet included. The gathered force of our weekend worship services links us together across geography and time zones where we are made stronger in our diversity and our unity.

In organizing in this way, we reflect the nature of God as I Am = Us for Them, There.

In the following sections we will begin to narrow our focus to the smaller, distributed expressions of the church, but it is important to pause at the beginning to review the guiding principles of this vision. These principles move the church outward and against an attractional and consumeristic culture.

GUIDING PRINCIPLES OF THE DISTRIBUTED CHURCH

- Centering the church on God and forming around others rather than insisting that “our church” is the center of the universe. This is a “Copernican Revolution” of the church.
- Intentionally distributing the church with a goal of ultimate connection through the kind of relationship that reflects God’s image.
- Networking churches and sharing resources with one another, linking differences and bridging distances for the benefit of all.
- Providing a way for the church at large to benefit from our differences, being perfected by those enough like us to be intimate yet different enough to be necessary.
- Modeling comprehensive ways in which spiritual maturity will continue to develop through generations of relationships.
- Spending much of Christian life connected to those who are outside the local congregation
- Putting the resources of the church as close to people as possible, offering meeting points and access to resources, in order to assist Christians in empowering others.
- Connecting to outsiders (“them”) and serving them where they are (“there”), rather than getting them to join us.
- Arranging the church around the relationships of the congregation and partner ministries, rather than mainly in and around a physical church building.
- Connecting with neighboring (non-Northland) Christians for support and encouragement to better serve their communities.
- Reorienting ministry efforts from inside to outside, from solitary to partnered, to an arrangement that constantly reminds us of God.

DISTRIBUTED CHURCH DEFINITION

I Am = Us For Them, There
Disciples of Jesus, in relationship, for the benefit of others, where they are.

A distributed church is a group of people who are choosing to focus their lives on Jesus in such a way that their very existence, activities, and conversations proclaim the good news of God. Connected to a network of churches and committed to one another, a distributed church is a spiritual family whose identity and arrangement is centered on who God is, what He has done, and what He calls the church to be and do in this world.

In other words, a distributed church is a group of people who are focusing their lives on Jesus, seeking to more intentionally relate to one another in Life-giving ways (community), help one another become established in the teaching and character of Jesus (discipleship), and together live out the mission of Jesus (service and evangelism).

What is the typical size? It varies: 10-15; 20-50; 70; even 2-3 can be an emerging church.

Model: **Healthy Extended Family**

Catalytic Event: **Family Meal** (The Lord's Supper)

Distinctive Attribute: **Love** ...of God
 ...of One Another
 ...of Neighbor

One thing you see from this definition is that living as the church is not limited to gathering in particular types of buildings for a particular kind of experience. It also isn't about adding a bunch of different events to our lives. It is about being a particular kind of people intentionally linking together around a particular way of life. In fact, the early followers of Jesus were said to follow "The Way."

Living as the church is about being a people, centered on Jesus as the head and cornerstone, maturing together as a living, breathing proclamation of the Gospel, to serve and include those not yet included, in our neighborhoods, and cities, and nations. (Exodus 6:7; Jeremiah 30:22; Leviticus 26:12; Matthew 5:14-16; Luke 10:2; Colossians 1:15-20; Ephesians 2:11-22; 1 Peter 2:1-9; Revelation 21)

God's plan to bring His kingdom to earth has not changed and the heart of that plan is communities of disciples, transformed by Jesus, serving others.

WHO IS MY FUTURE DISTRIBUTED CHURCH?

In order to fully grasp the definition of a distributed church, there is one more layer we need to add. If a distributed church is a group of people, where do those people come from and what holds them together? Is it boundary lines or a gravitational center?

There are two primary approaches to understanding when a group of people constitute a "church." The first is to clearly define the boundary lines of what a "church" is. If we can outline the criteria precisely enough, we can analyze a group of people and decide if they meet the definition. In this way of thinking, someone is either in or they are out. If someone is "out", the goal is to get them to go through a series of adjustments to get "in".

The other way to understand when a group of people constitute a "church" is to concentrate less on the boundary lines and look more at the center. This way focuses on the people being pulled in by a common identity or common purpose. In this way of looking at things, someone is either heading toward the center or they are heading away from the center, regardless of how near or far away they are. If someone is heading away from the center, the goal is to get them to turn back toward the common identity and/or common purpose.

Organizations are focused on defining boundary lines.

Movements are focused on defining the gravitational center. (In fact, once hard boundaries are used to define a movement it inevitably becomes an organization.)

While the clear boundary line understanding can be helpful in classification, it is rarely helpful in relationship and mission. As such, a distributed church is defined more by its gravitational center. A distributed church is made up of people linked together in the overlapping relationships where God has providentially placed them, pulled by the gravitational center of following and serving Jesus. Yes, this leaves the boundary lines a bit blurry, but it also facilitates total life congruency instead of compartmentalization.

Who are the people you overlap with most that are headed toward Christ?

This is the likely starting place for forming your distributed church.

Who are the people you overlap with most that could be headed toward Christ?

This is the likely starting place for your distributed church's mission.

CENTERING CREEDS or DEFINED DOCTRINE

The same boundary lines vs gravitational center distinction appears when we talk about the things people must believe to be a part of a distributed church, or participate in a network of distributed churches. While clearly articulated doctrine is a very worthwhile pursuit, particularly when developed in the context of community, it does not make for a valuable prerequisite to relationship. That is why

distributed churches are defined more by the center of beliefs - the ancient confessions as articulated in the Apostle's Creed and/or the Nicene Creed - than a stance on less essential doctrines.

In relationships and in belief, we are looking for the ways we overlap, not the categories into which we fit.

UNIFYING ATTRIBUTES

The highly contextual nature of relationships and cultures make it necessary for great freedom in form. Distributed churches are developed around biblical principles, not specific procedures and rules. The New Testament writers understood this. So, the goal isn't to develop a list of uniform should be and how to's, but rather to identify the right principles that can be applied in any context. The goal of this Field Guide is not to answer every question, but rather to pose the key questions that need to be answered in your situation.

In the midst of this vast diversity of form, there are still patterns that emerge. Healthy distributed churches display unifying attributes. The writers of the Scriptures often refer to the church as the body of Christ. Just as no one body looks identical to another, we still find consistent attributes that are likely present in a healthy body.

A distributed church...

- ...centers on God and forms around others.
- ...honors God for who He is, and what He has done as revealed through the Scriptures.
- ...understands "church" as a spiritual family of people and as a way of life.
- ...values and encourages every-member participation in the extension of the church.
- ...seeks to identify the gifts and abilities of each person in the church.
- ...includes the uninvited (see Evangelism).
- ...disciples one another (see Establish).
- ...develops leaders (see Entrust).
- ...multiplies (see Repeat).
- ...is linked through relationships and technology with other churches in a network (in a spirit of accountability and mutual benefit).

...is a church. Though a distributed church may be integrated with a larger resource center, it is not a small group, cell group, Bible study, or other subset of a church. A distributed church takes responsibility for the ministry to its members and supports them to carry out the mission in their particular context, there. Distributed churches partner with a resource center so they can be more effective in their ministry; they don't solely refer needs to the resource center or function purely independently.

THE 4 DISTINCTIVES

What makes a distributed church truly a church - and therefore different than a small group, home group, or Bible study - is that they embrace the following four things:

Self Identity - a distributed church understands its identity and function as that of a church. This isn't merely about a choice of term or what members call themselves; it is about a commitment to being the church in your context, embracing God's ministry and mission (Us for Them, There). As a result, spiritual families/distributed churches don't see themselves as an aspect of the church, but as a whole church interconnected with other churches.

As a foundation for their identity and connection to other churches, distributed churches align with the historic theological creeds (The Apostle's Creed, Nicene Creed, etc.).

Sacred Practices - a distributed church integrates the sacred practices of communion, baptism, weddings, and funerals as part of their shared life and worship. These are the practices that God has given us to affirm our identity in Him.

Service to Empower - a distributed church understands that it is who it is for the benefit of others. It pursues opportunities to serve one another and those outside its group in a way that empowers them to serve others as well. It embraces the opportunities for ministry that God brings its way.

Spontaneous Expansion - A distributed church is focused on the expansion of the Church. It understands that its mission is to make disciples. So, a distributed church multiplies. These are churches that plant churches that plant churches.

What isn't needed to be a distributed church is a building, band, powerpoint presentation, or professional clergy. When we understand that, and we get down to the essentials of what it means to be a church we can begin to see "church" more along the lines of family. When we define church along the lines of family we are freed up to create churches in a whole new way.

Again, God's plan to bring His kingdom to earth has not changed and the heart of that plan is communities of disciples, transformed by Jesus, serving others.

COMPLEX NETWORK OF CHURCHES

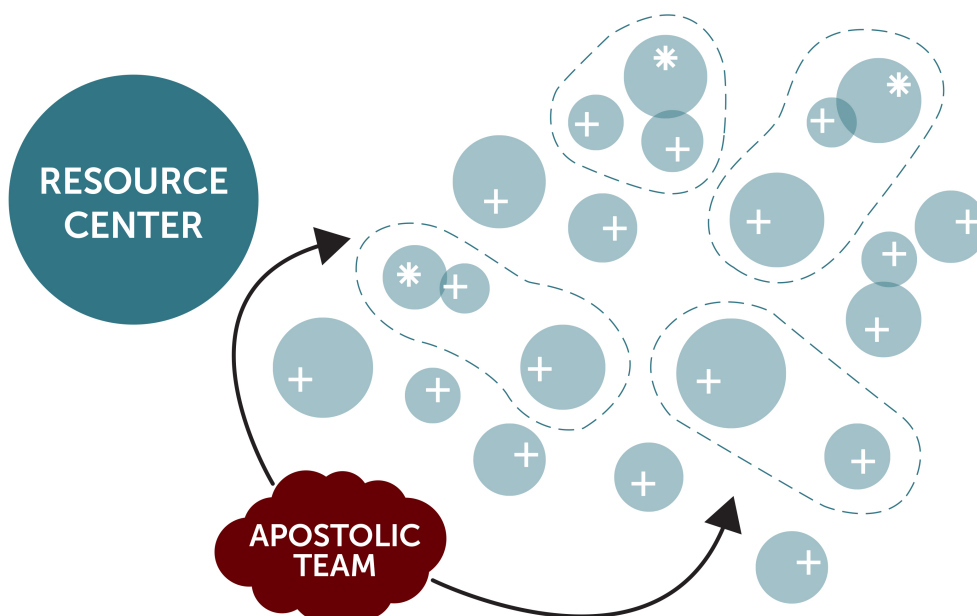
The resources we need for spiritual growth are embedded in our relationships - our "us" and our "them." This maxim of interdependence is true at an individual level, but also at a church level. Thus, to be fully understood, a single distributed church must operate within the context of the network of churches. Distributed churches do not function in an isolated fashion, but rather are designed for cooperation, interdependence and linking together. These are key aspects of a distributed church's DNA.

The small, authentic community provides the ideal environment for spiritual formation and Christian witness, but the full mission is too big to be accomplished by a single distributed church. Thus, we not only orient ourselves for those outside our group, but also partner together with those outside our extended family. To make disciples of all nations (Matthew 28:19-20), to be Christ's witnesses to the ends of the earth (Acts 1:8), and to see the whole earth filled with the knowledge of the Glory of God (Habbakuk 2:14) requires the mutual participation and cooperation by all.

The network is also a way to ensure sound doctrine and protect against heresy or rogue leaders. The need for cross-pollination is a part of the fabric of God's design for the universe. Isolation whether in plants or distributed churches, increases the likelihood for poor health. So, distributed churches link with one another through every element of the network.

It is as a network of churches that we again reflect the identity of I Am = Us For Them There.

ELEMENTS OF THE NETWORK



Distributed Church - a group of people who are choosing to focus their lives on Jesus in such a way that their very existence, activities, and conversations proclaim the good news of God. Connected to a network of churches and committed to one another, a distributed church is a spiritual family whose identity and arrangement is centered on who God is, what He has done, and what He calls the church to be and do in this world. Led by Church Leaders.

Cluster - a group of distributed churches linked together through overlapping leadership for common purpose and shared resources. The basis of the cluster could be geography, ethnicity (for example, immigrants who all speak the same language), life stage, denominational affiliation, or another common bond that leads to mutual participation. Most often clusters form naturally as a result of geography or because a church multiplies and are self-organizing. Led by Cluster Leaders.

Resource Center - an equipping center for the distributed churches and the network, as well as a mechanism to deliver central resources to people and organizations that cannot solely be provided in the distributed churches and/or clusters. This would include assets of church development such as large worship gatherings, Life Hope, children's curriculum, technological tools, advanced Pastoral care, training resources for distributed church leaders, etc.

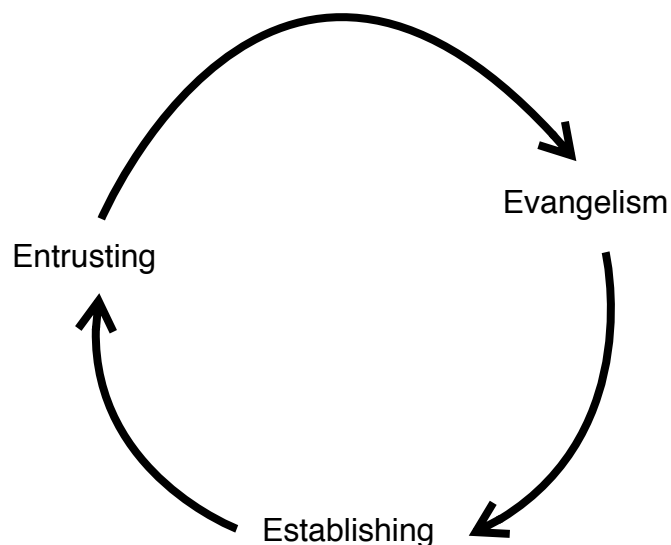
Apostolic Team - a group of guiding leaders focused on helping churches get formed and established, shaping them and building them into strong networks, and correcting error or replacing leaders where necessary. The apostolic team operates within the local context, but is primarily focused on the expansion of the network.

The nature of God establishes the ideal identity, the definition and other tools give us clarity of direction, and the network finishes the framework. We have the navigational tools to get where God has called us. Now, we build up the distributed church.

SECTION B: DISTRIBUTING THE CHURCH

EARLY CHURCH PATTERN OF CHURCH PLANTING

Luke's recording of the work of the Holy Spirit through the acts of the apostles gives the church today a picture of how the Gospel spread in the beginning and forms a pattern that we can emulate today. Acts provides the narrative of the story; the epistles reveal the training content for establishing a church. By reading both Acts as well as Paul's letters, we see a model for distributed churches to follow. It is what we refer to as the Early Church Pattern of Church Planting.



There are three key Scriptures that provide an overview of this pattern for the church:

- Acts 13:1-14:28: Evangelize, establish local churches, and train leaders.
- 1 Timothy 3:14-16: Establish churches (the center of the pastoral writings).
- Ephesians 4:11-16: Equip the saints for the work of ministry.

In each of these three key areas, several functions take place:

Evangelism: The Gospel is spread in neighborhoods, at work, in schools, and among family and friends as the Holy Spirit works through authentic relationships and the faithful wise activity and proclamation of believers. The church is also a witness in the community as it seeks the welfare of the city by serving in a variety of capacities.

Establishing: The church is established in the faith by growing in relationships, teaching, and ministry. New believers are taught and model the first principles of the faith through a community of believers. Every person understands they have gifts and abilities to contribute to the Kingdom.

Entrusting: The church develops leaders to give oversight and spiritual direction to the gathered community. These leaders are identified, trained, and commissioned for shepherding the church. Leaders are also recognized for their desire and abilities to expand the Kingdom of God, and are trained to more effectively lead in planting new churches and leading networks of churches.

This pattern and process provides the framework for the mission of a distributed church and must be embedded into its DNA. If followed, the result is the Gospel expanded by the unorganized activity of believers, led by the Holy Spirit, resulting in new churches spontaneously emerging and being linked together into networks. This **spontaneous expansion** of the Gospel is a key goal and indicator of health of a distributed church.

Note: The spontaneous expansion of the Gospel, through the early church pattern of church planting, is in contrast to the typical expansion seen today that is highly controlled and organized by a religious institution.

EVANGELIZE - ESTABLISH - ENTRUST - REPEAT

GOD SO LOVED THE WORLD

God loves the people of this world. The incarnation of Jesus is evidence of it. While He was on earth, Jesus couldn't stop talking about it. His death on a cross is proof of it. God loves sinners. He loves the sick. He loves the broken. He loves the wanderers. He loves the outsiders. He loves us.

God loves people so much that He gave His son as a ransom for all. (John 3:16)

So a church that reflects the image of God is a church that loves the outsider. It is a church that cares for one another, for we too were once outsiders, but it is also a church that keeps a spot open at the table for those not yet included. And we don't just wait for them to join us, we invite them to the feast...

AS YOU GO, MAKE DISCIPLES

*Jesus came up and spoke to them, saying, "All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. **Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations**, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age." (Matthew 28:18-20)*

This is the final statement of Jesus in the Gospel of Matthew. Why, with His last words on earth, would Jesus focus His instruction on making disciples? He could have told a story reminding his followers of the keys to the abundant life that He had talked about before, or reinforced the great commandment to love God and neighbor. Instead he issues a calling. And why then would followers of Jesus be willing to die making this happen for the benefit of others?

The apostle John answers this question in the beginning and end of his Gospel:

In Him was life, and the life was the Light of men. (John 1:4)

and that believing you may have life in His name. (John 20:31b)

In the end Jesus was giving the key to a good life - life in and through Him. The commission of Jesus isn't a power grab by a renegade ruler, but an announcement from the God of love that He is setting to right all things. And, that He is giving us the great privilege of joining Him in that work.

It is for this reason that we tell people the Good News of God and the good news in this world. It is for this reason that Paul would pen this amazing declaration in his letter to the Corinthian churches:

Now all these things are from God, who reconciled us to Himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation, namely, that God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and He has committed to us the word of reconciliation.

Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were making an appeal through us; we beg you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God. He made Him who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf, so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him. (2 Corinthians 5:18-21)

Jesus is the hope of the world. And He has entrusted us with the message of hope and Good News, not only for life after death, but also for life today. Never have we needed proclaimers of this hope and Good News more than we do today. Never have we needed small communities of people to demonstrate the power of the Gospel more than we do today. This is not a time for us to huddle together in protection from the world. This is a time to go forth and love our neighbor as ourselves.

EVANGELISM FOCUS

When Jesus gave the Great Commission He gave all of His followers the calling of making disciples wherever they went. In fact, the language He uses would more appropriately be translated “as you go, make disciples...” Jesus was not commanding us to make a special trip to share our faith with others but rather directing us toward something that best takes place along the way in the close proximity of relationship.

Making disciples is not something primarily to be left to the professional minister, outside the context of relationship, but is the privilege of every person who follows Jesus. We are not trying to convince people or debate people into a relationship with Jesus. We are living and sharing our story of faith. The people most likely to be impacted by our story, the story of the way Jesus has changed us, are the people we see all the time.

This relational connection is why distributed churches become key. If we are going to bring the church close to people in a way that they can witness the power of the Gospel to transform lives, then we have to organize the church outside the walls of a central building. And, if the people that encounter these Gospel communities are compelled by what they encounter, we need to include them without referring them to an institution.

So, we live out our faith and relationships in close proximity to our friends and neighbors and coworkers. We also include them in the life of our distributed church whenever possible, inviting them to join into meals or serving others, and offering to serve and pray for them in challenging situations.

This can be intimidating, but it need not be complicated. Pray. Serve. Build actual friendships (and stay friends whether they believe in Jesus or not). As you do each, listen for opportunities to share the story of how God has impacted your life with His love and forgiveness.

There are great resources to equip you to share the story of God in your life. It is beyond the scope of this guide to get into specific techniques or methods. In fact, the brilliance of the writers of the Bible

is that they understood that the calling was universal, the Gospel itself was universal, but how they shared it varied from situation to situation.

Go to www.resourcewell.org to find more specific tools and techniques to help you.

There are also great resources and ideas for serving people well at www.servingtoempower.net .

EVANGELIZE - **ESTABLISH** - ENTRUST - REPEAT

BAPTIZING AND TEACHING THEM

*Jesus came up and spoke to them, saying, "All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, **baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I commanded you;** and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age." (Matthew 28:18-20)*

We need to clear up a widely held but incomplete view: baptism is not solely an outward sign of inward change - it is that - but it is also an initiation rite. Baptism existed before Jesus made it the initiation rite for His followers. Baptism is a sacred practice that prepares one for entry into a new way of life with a new group of people.

Therefore it is not random that Jesus links the command to make disciples with baptism and teaching. He understood what we have often forgotten. Arranging our lives around Jesus happens in the context of community. In this Jesus community - a church - we learn how to observe all that Jesus commanded us. What this means is the church actually exists for the purpose of discipleship.

C.S. Lewis articulates this idea well in *Mere Christianity* when he says, "The Church exists for nothing else but to draw men into Christ, to make them little Christs. If they are not doing that, all the cathedrals, clergy, missions, sermons, even the Bible itself, are simply a waste of time. God became Man for no other purpose. It is even doubtful, you know, whether the whole universe was created for any other purpose."

The church is Jesus's vehicle for discipleship. Seeking to make disciples results in churches. They are so linked that "church" and "discipleship" are almost synonyms.

As much as it offends our western sensibilities of individualism, becoming a disciple of Jesus is not something we can do alone. And it is not something we can do anonymously. It is not simply conversion to a belief system that gives one access to a particular eternal destination followed by a commitment to live by a particular ethic. It is a conformation to a way of life. And that way of life necessitates others.

If breaking a simple habit is hard, then conforming our whole lives around the commands of Jesus is going to be extremely difficult. We'll need more than just will power. Attending worship services will certainly help, but we'll need a bit more of a robust structure for the other 166-167 hours a week. A distributed church is that structure.

That begs the question, how do you start one?

THE PROCESS OF ESTABLISHING A DISTRIBUTED CHURCH

You might have an existing group of friends that already functions as a distributed church, but don't realize it as such. Your vision might be to form a church entirely from people currently disconnected from Jesus. Or, you might look around your network of relationships and realize that you are surrounded by followers of Jesus disconnected from one another. Every circumstance and situation is different. So, creating a definitive multi-step process for starting a distributed church is a futile exercise. Use this as a guide and ask God to show you how to adjust it to your specific situation.

Phase I - Join God

- Pray. Seek God. Watch and listen for what God is doing in your context. God has providentially placed you where you are, with the people you are with. Why?

Phase II - Join One Another Together

- Identify potential team leaders, the core group of people that will help you provide key leadership for the distributed church. If you're building a church with people you are leading to Christ, then the initial converts can become the leadership team.
- Study the Scriptures together, particularly Acts and the Epistles, and discuss (as leaders or with the whole initial church) what it means to be a church - to link together to reflect the image of God as I Am = Us for Them, There.

Phase III - Build a One-Minded Vision

- Develop an initial plan for serving people outside your group and engaging ministry opportunities that God brings your way. (Go to resourcewell.org for resources and ideas)
- Develop an initial plan for establishing your community in the faith and establishing your identity as a church. (If your distributed church has children involved, then you want to think through a plan for children as well as adults. See Appendix 1 for resources)
- Develop an initial plan for meeting together. How often (weekly is the Biblical pattern)? What do you hope to accomplish in the different gatherings? How does your group interact with worship services at Northland?
- Develop an initial plan for utilizing the gifting of all.
- Develop an initial plan for multiplying churches.

Phase IV - Take It To The Next Level

- Call forward those who demonstrate the desire to lead, developing in them the character qualifications given to Timothy and Titus.
- Set in order what remains by continually studying the Scriptures and working to align your lives around the kingdom of God.

Resources:

There is a list of key questions to help you think through the process of establishing a distributed church in your context in Appendix 2.

THE GATHERING

A distributed church is more than getting together once a week, but a catalyst for the shared ministry and mission is the weekly gathering to celebrate the resurrection of Jesus and spur one another on toward love and good deeds. With Christ as the focus of the community, here is an example of what a distributed church might do when gathered:

Doors to the home open well before the meal time. People are encouraged to come early if they are able. The time is open to help prepare and set up, hang out, bring a friend to play pool, watch football, talk and catch up, and let the kids play. The atmosphere feels like getting good friends and relatives together for a holiday.

The meal begins when almost everyone is there. The host welcomes everyone and reminds them of their purpose in gathering. A leader begins the meal with the bread, or something that can be eaten, reads a portion of Scripture reminding everyone of Christ's provision on our behalf, prays and blesses the meal (the cup may be blessed at this point or taken together at the end of the meal). Then everyone eats! The tone of this is joyful and celebratory and allows everyone to enjoy the meal together. At the conclusion of the meal, if not done in the beginning, the leader draws everyone's attention toward the cup and, completing the sacrament of communion together, Scripture is read and concluded with prayer or possibly a song. The principle here is that the meal is communion: the body of Christ gathered around the body of Christ symbolic, remembering the body of Christ risen.

After the meal, the group transitions to the more structured time of discussion and contribution, and most likely this involves moving into another room. At this point, younger children can stay with the group or through pre-arrangement, someone might share in the rotation of teaching the younger kids in a different room. We encourage as many of the kids to stay as possible in order to experience the church community together.

Often, what works well is to begin with a time of songs, stories, and inviting people to share what God is doing in their lives (This can include children). After a period of time, a pre-arranged couple of people take the children into another room for a child specific lesson, while the conversation is focused on a more specific teaching and discussion of scripture, and prayer.

After the time of mutual contribution of scripture, song, prayer, and discussion, a leader concludes the structured time in an appropriate way. People are free to leave, but are welcome to stay to continue conversations.

The eucharistic gathering for the week is over, but the gathering is intended to serve as a catalyst for authentic relationship and connection throughout the week as the community seeks to proclaim the gospel through their individual and community life.

In Summary:

A typical distributed church gathering is **IN A HOME** (or a storefront, or under a tree) **AROUND A MEAL** (The Lord's Supper) with a focused time of **DISCUSSION OF SCRIPTURE** (devotion to the apostles' teaching) and **PRAYER** where **EVERY MEMBER PARTICIPATES** through the discussion of Scripture or an artistic contribution (psalms, hymns, spiritual songs). (Acts 2:42-47; Ephesians 5:17-20)

It may also include conversation about opportunities to **INCLUDE THE UNINCLUDED**, conversation about a **PLAN TO SERVE** (a specific people, place, organization, or cause), and **COMMUNICATION FROM THE NETWORK** through relationships, correspondence and/or technology.

Resources:

For a further discussion of the different elements of the gathering, see Appendix 3.

SACRED PRACTICES

God, in his providence, has given us simple and repeatable practices that invite us to lift up our eyes and engage the transcendent in the midst of our everyday lives. Using common elements like water, bread, dirt, metal, air, these rituals point us to the reality of the kingdom beyond the material elements of our lives. Sometimes called sacraments, sometimes referred to as sacerdotal functions, we call them sacred practices. These sacred practices - communion, baptism, weddings, funerals - are vital to a distributed church's shared life and worship.

Leaders of distributed churches are encouraged to perform any and all of the typical "church" functions within their community. They affirm the identity of the distributed church, and often a group does not feel like a legit church until they engage in the sacred practices together. Baptizing a new believer, or partaking of communion can be a transforming event for a group of people finding their identity as a distributed church.

In the situations where official ordination or other resources are necessary, the Resource Center can come alongside the Church Leaders to help with the credentials and training they need.

See resourcewell.org for more ideas and ways to use the sacred practices in the context of distributed churches.

COMMUNITY

Before we move on to a discussion about developing leaders to carry the ministry and mission forward (Entrusting), we should also say a word about the relationships we hope to see formed in the context of distributed churches.

Distributed churches can be the environment for deep and meaningful relationships, but it is important to remember that some targets cannot be hit by aiming directly at them. Character is a good example of this kind of target. While one may aspire to develop character, character itself is developed through a focus on other things. Community functions in much the same way.

There is a certain quality of relationship and commitment to one another that are represented when we use the word “community.” But, simply focusing on this type of relationship, or worse demanding this level of intimacy and commitment from one another without giving it time and the right environment to develop can actually be detrimental to the goal.

Relationships can be formed around affinity, similarity, or common purpose. The goal of a distributed church is to form the relationships around the latter. The common purpose of helping one another conform our lives to Christ, serve one another and our neighbor, and carry the mission of Jesus into the world makes for a strong, unifying basis for community. Affinity and similarity can bolster the connection, but it is in the fire of this common purpose that meaningful, sacrificial relationships are formed.

EVANGELIZE - ESTABLISH - **ENTRUST** - REPEAT

In his letter to the churches in Colossae, Paul declares that Christ “is before all things, and in Him all things hold together. He is also head of the body, the church.” Jesus Himself took ownership of “His Church” when he proclaimed to Peter “I also say to you that you are Peter, and upon this rock I will **build My church**; and the gates of Hades will not overpower it.” We are Christ’s Church. He is the head, He is our identity, and He is the one we serve.

But there is also a pervasive expectation throughout the scriptures that everyday people would be the ones to carry Christ’s work forward. The church we read about in the Bible was not a movement of an elite class of highly educated people; the church of the Bible was a movement of regular people transformed by the presence of Jesus. In fact, in an exchange between the elite religious class and the disciples in Acts 4, the religious elite comment on the contrast between the disciples’ works and their ordinariness.

“When they saw the courage of Peter and John and realized that they were unschooled, ordinary men, they were astonished and they took note that these men had been with Jesus.” (Acts 4:13)

It is Christ’s church, fueled by the Holy Spirit, and He has chosen to bestow upon us all the “priesthood of all believers” as declared by Peter:

“But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God’s special possession, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light.” (1 Peter 2:9)

The building of the Church has been entrusted to us by Jesus and we are invited to engage the work for the progress of the Gospel instead of deferring to professionals and institutions. We must exhort and encourage every follower of Jesus to use their gifts and embrace the ministry and mission given to them by God. And, we must identify those among us that show particular skill in leading, and train them up to carry the mission forward. Engaging the mission of God can happen by leading local groups of people or focusing on expansion of the movement of Christ around the world.

LEADERS

Leadership of a distributed church is more about guiding a community to live according to their identity as Jesus followers (I Am = Us For Them There), than it is about executing a "to do" list. As Jesus defined leading as serving. Leaders must demonstrate a consistent effort to establish the group in the faith that unites them, help them become a spiritual family, and exhort them to love and good deeds. Leading also involves connecting the distributed church to the wider network and movement of what God is doing, and raising up leaders to expand the movement through the establishment of new churches.

PLURALITY OF LEADERSHIP

Distributed churches are led by a team. Collective leadership lightens the workload for each person, making the church life-giving and sustainable, but it also provides a variety of gifting, making the church more effective in its mission. This posture requires more patience, discussion, and dependence on prayer and Scripture and can at times be slow and frustrating. Not everyone is equal in their knowledge of the Bible, their gifting from God, and even their commitment, so deference to the strengths and perspectives of others is key.

In addition to a plurality of leadership, the churches are designed to encourage every member participation in the life of the church, and the gatherings of the church. As Paul repeatedly reminds the early churches, there are a variety of gifts necessary for the church to function together as an extended family. This valuing of the other and encouraging contribution from all is key to the experience of the smaller church community and is a large part of how the community itself is a proclamation of the Gospel. (Romans 12:3-8)

ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

The primary image the Bible uses to help us understand the role of church leader is that of shepherd. Jesus, Paul, and Peter regularly turned to shepherding metaphors in their instructions to the leaders of churches and in the first-century, agrarian culture this would have invoked imagery of commitment, courage, skill, hard work, along with tenderness, sacrifice, faithfulness, and love. Using the metaphor of shepherd as a backdrop, we can outline the role church leaders play within the church community:

Model the life (1 Timothy 4:1-16; 2 Timothy 2:3-6)

- Live a life oriented around Jesus.
- Care for practical needs of the church.
- Serve people outside your church.
- Seek to include those not yet included.

Establish the church (Titus 1:5; 2:15; Timothy 3:14-16; 1 Thessalonians 2:1-3:10)

- Take responsibility for the spiritual formation of people.

- Dedicate time to prayer, scripture, and giving and receiving spiritual direction.
- Lead between gatherings, not just in the time of gathering, to develop the community into an extended family.

Teach Scripture; Guard the teaching (2 Timothy. 4:1-4; 2:22-26; 1 Timothy 4:1-16)

- Teaching in a distributed church is via dialogue, not lecture.

Identify gifts and abilities of the church; in particular devote time to developing leaders (Romans 12:3-8; Acts 20:17-38; 2 Timothy 2:2; 1 Timothy 3:1-7; 5:17-25; Titus 1:2-9)

- Build a team to share responsibility for the functioning of the group.
- Call out leaders.
- Commission new churches in response to opportunities the Holy Spirit presents.

Respond to opportunities to take the Gospel to new areas and establish new churches (Acts 13:1-14:26; 15:36-16:5; Philippians 1:3-7; 2:19-24; 1 Thessalonians 1:1-3:13; 1 Tim. 3:14-16; Titus 1:5)

- Local opportunities
- International opportunities

In summary: Live the life. Pray. Shepherd the family. Establish people in the foundational principles of the faith by teaching the Word. Guard that teaching from false teachers. Exhort and admonish the saints in sound doctrine. Call out the God given gifts in the church. Raise up new leaders to establish new churches. Spur the church on to love and good deeds in such a way that the sick are visited, the poor are cared for, the widows and orphans find community, the neighborhood and city are blessed, and the Gospel is proclaimed.

Easy, right?

TRAINING

The key philosophy of training is this: All training is IN ministry, not FOR ministry.

The reasoning behind this philosophy brings us back to the commission Jesus gave us in Matthew 28. “As you are going...” Jesus’s methodology was to develop people along the way; His exhortation to us follows this same approach.

The brilliance of this approach is the understanding that community and context are as important to training as content. Paul correctly exhorts us to be transformed by the renewing of our minds, but this doesn’t simply equate to knowing a set of intellectual precepts. If that were the case, then a lecture once a week would work (and transformation would be much more prevalent today)! The kind of transformation and renewal Paul is talking about is orienting our minds toward wisdom as we conform our lives around the Truth. The training for this comes in the context of life situations, as we learn from those further along, and develop right responses and habits and ultimately character.

In fact, most of the qualifications and discussions of leadership in Scripture have to do with character. It is clear that who you are becoming, and the gifts that God has given you, are more important than

your ability to wax eloquently on obscure doctrinal issues, or whether or not you can organize a Sunday morning worship service.

The Apostles left us a great deposit of faith that can be transferred from person to person, and community to community. The foundation is the Gospel. What follows is a lifelong pursuit of mastering the Scriptures that the Apostles assumed would be normative for every follower of Jesus. In fact, the writer of Hebrews has some stern words to the churches that had ceased this pursuit (Hebrews 5:12-14). So, we train each other IN ministry, along the way, as we together follow Jesus.

This also brings us back to the parallel between church and discipleship. Because they are so closely linked, the core of what you need to pursue is how to lead people toward a life of serving Jesus and serving others in the name of Jesus. What you don't need to know is how to run an institution.

By beginning to form your existing relationships into a distributed church, a church outside the walls of a building, you'll be joining illiterate goat farmers in India that are leading churches. You'll join factory workers in China that are leading churches. And in the United States you'll join teachers, landscapers, lawyers, construction workers, and people from all walks of life leading churches. In fact, around the world only a small percentage of the church is led by professional clergy.

So, do you need training before you start? You need the Gospel and you need the Holy Spirit. Do you need training along the way? Yes, and you'll spend your whole life pursuing it. Will you do any of this alone? No. You'll be connect through relationship to people in your distributed church and other leaders in the network of churches.

What about your failures and insecurities? Remember that God only uses broken vessels and wounded healers. There has only ever been one sinless person and He is the one inviting you to join Him in this work.

Go to resourcewell.org to find the specific tools and training you can use for basic discipleship, and the advanced training you'll need if you find God calling you to lead a cluster or a whole network of churches.

EVANGELIZE - ESTABLISH - ENTRUST - **REPEAT**

A healthy church is a church that multiplies. Why? Because that displays the very character of God. John 3:16 captures this great heart of God detailing a love that expands boundaries and reaches out to the world. As the church increases, the heart of God is witnessed by the watching world.

Luke paints this picture in the narrative of Acts. Listen to the language threading together God's love and an ever increasing Church:

*And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved
(Acts 2:47).*

*So the word of God spread. The number of disciples in Jerusalem increased rapidly,
and a large number of priests became obedient to the faith (Acts 6:7).*

*Then the church throughout Judea, Galilee and Samaria enjoyed a time of peace
and was strengthened. Living in the fear of the Lord and encouraged by the Holy
Spirit, it increased in numbers (Acts 9:31).*

But the word of God continued to spread and flourish (Acts 12:24).

*So the churches were strengthened in the faith and grew daily in numbers
(Acts 16:5).*

In this way the word of the Lord spread widely and grew in power (Acts 19:20).

*He proclaimed the kingdom of God and taught about the Lord Jesus Christ—with all
boldness and without hindrance! (Acts 28:31).*

But this description of God goes far beyond the gospels and the chronicling of the early church. The prophets capture the heart of God for His people:

*Enlarge the place of your tent, stretch your tent curtains wide, do not hold back;
lengthen your cords, strengthen your stakes (Isaiah 54:2).*

Ultimately, this mission to multiply goes all the way back to the beginning, where God creates and sends His people to accomplish His purposes:

*As for you, be fruitful and increase in number; multiply on the earth and increase
upon it (Genesis 9:7).*

In other words, as the great missionary and writer Roland Allen wrote: “The Church was first established and organized with a world-wide mission for a world-wide work.” This mission and work is more than a strategy: It's a cooperation with the Holy Spirit to display the heart of God.

MULTIPLICATION PROCESSES

As it relates to growing and multiplying churches, let's state from the outset what we are not saying: God's heart for adding to the number daily those who are being saved is not a small group formula for growing and then dividing groups in half.

There is a prevalent model of church growth that says "when you reach a certain number, you need to split the group in half. Repeat. Repeat." This is why people often hear "division" when we say "multiplication". Division is not the distributed church strategy. Meaningful relationships often take years to develop and are forged in the trenches of shared purpose. We value those relationships and don't want to split those save for a unique calling of God. A distributed church needs to be mission oriented, understanding that community is something to be shared not protected, but spontaneous expansion, whether through people joining the church or starting new churches, need not threaten valuable relationships of support and encouragement.

Likewise, spontaneous expansion or multiplication *is not* a strategy for the large church to funnel new people into small groups. As new people attend weekend services, many will naturally want to get involved. The answer is not in connecting new people into a distributed church in which they have no relationships. Other steps have been created to help those new people join one of Northland's churches.

Spontaneous expansion can happen in several ways. None of which are mutually exclusive.

1. The initial leader of the distributed church identifies and trains new leaders, turns the responsibility of the church over to those new leaders, and then the initial leader moves on to start another church. Some people have a gift for starting and establishing the church. Those people, can and should be apply that gift more than once; Paul and others in the early church had this unique gift.
2. Everyone in the church looks for opportunities to help other people start distributed churches. When you connect with someone interested (or you lead someone to Christ), the goal is to help them start a distributed church in their context. It might make sense to invite them into an existing church for a time, or you might send leaders to guide them in the beginning, but you are clear from the start that you want to help them initiate a distributed church. This helps new believers reach their relationships with the Gospel at a much quicker rate than assimilating them into an existing community.

3. As people mature in the context of a distributed church, leaders are commissioned to start new churches. These leaders respond to new opportunities to bring the church to people who would otherwise not be included. Sometimes the "sending church" may send multiple people or multiple families to join the new church and get it established.

The initial distributed church and new distributed church stay connected via the Cluster, except in unique circumstances. In fact, churches multiplying is the primary reason a Cluster forms. The Cluster can gather periodically, and leaders can stay connected on an ongoing basis. The Cluster structure provides shared leadership and oversight in the network and increases the ability to mobilize resources in response to need or opportunities. This structure also allows for even new believers to get churches started, a major catalyst for spontaneous expansion.

MARKS OF A HEALTHY CHURCH

EQUIPPING THE SAINTS

Before the churches had Field Guides or even the New Testament scriptures, God superintended their development through people. He gave certain people gifts that came with inherent skills and inherent values. These people equipped the saints for ministry, and amazingly the end result was that the church built itself up in love with Christ as the head. According to Ephesians 4:11-16 those people were called apostles, prophets, evangelists, shepherds and teachers.

The prevailing way we apply this today is at an individual level: which people have this or that gift?, are these individuals represented in this church?, etc. But another way, and probably a better way in our context, is to look at the whole church and identify which values would be present were those people present.

It is clear that all the gifts are needed for the church to build itself up in love. So rather than discussing who has what gift, the better conversation is to talk about the church as a whole. Is there evidence that our church cares about what an apostle would care about? Is there evidence that our church does what an apostle would do? What about prophets? Shepherds? Evangelists? Teachers?

Certainly there will be individuals who feel a pull toward one function over the other, but the discussion is not helpful separate from actual demonstration in the life of the church. The conversation about individual gifting can be subjective, but the fruit is much more reliable. This is the way we are encouraging you to use this important scripture in leading and evaluating your distributed church.

To aid you in discerning the health and DNA of your church we've extrapolated the values represented in the Ephesians 4 passage and created a series of questions to ask on an ongoing basis. Reference this list as you get a distributed church up and running to orient the group toward biblical values. Come back to this list periodically to assess your distributed church and make sure you haven't drifted too far or narrowed your ministry efforts:

Apostles

Is this church becoming established, with strong leadership and a solid foundation of maturity?

Is this church embracing God's mission in its context?

Is there a desire to see new churches started from efforts to make disciples?

Are new networks being established as churches multiply?

Is spontaneous expansion taking place within these churches?

Is this church connected to other churches and demonstrating a concern for the welfare of the Church universal?

Prophets

Does this church demonstrate a value and love of prayer?
Is there a practice of repentance, as believers keep short accounts with God?
Are people seeking to become fully devoted followers of Jesus regardless of their context?
Is discernment being exercised?
Is forgiveness offered generously among believers?
Is the bar for biblical character held high?

Evangelists

Is this church inviting new people in?
Is the Good News being shared authentically and regularly?
Are new believers being added to the body?
Are those who already belong being challenged to new levels of maturity?
Is growth (both numerically and spiritually) evident?
Are new believers taught how to share the Good News everywhere, every day as God gives opportunities?

Shepherds

Is Jesus the central focus as the author and perfecter of faith?
Is there unity among the body?
Is there a love between believers that is compelling to those who are brought in?
Is reconciliation happening between those who have disagreements or who have been wronged?
Is compassion shown to those who have stumbled?
Are those experiencing difficult times being supported/surrounded with practical care?
Is the church generous with the community, showing the love of Christ in practical ways?
Are we responding to the needs of others who God brings to our attention?

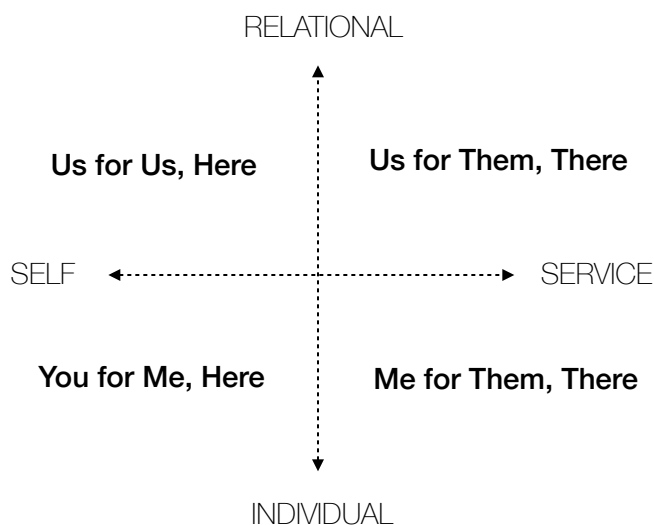
Teachers

Does the church value Scripture?
Are there endeavors to establish believers in their ongoing understanding of God's revelation to us through His Word?
Are believers being taught how to understand and apply Scripture?
Are people applying Scripture and being transformed?

TYPOLOGY: I AM = US FOR THEM, THERE

Another indicator of health is to look at the identity of the church. How is this group of people doing at living out the identity of I Am = Us for Them, There? Represented in that equation are worship (I Am), community (Us), and mission (for Them, There). These different aspects live in a kind of holy tension. Sometimes, to eliminate the tension, we place more value on one over the other.

The I Am = Us for Them, There equation creates a framework to understand how various groups and individuals understand themselves. We can use a vertical axis to understand whether the orientation is toward the individual or group; we can use a horizontal axis to understand whether the orientation is toward self or toward service (of the group and/or others).



You for Me, Here - Consumer Christian. Worship service attender who never moves beyond focusing on themselves. (this would also likely apply to someone yet to become a Christian)

When we are functioning in this mindset we see the church, or even a small group, as a feeding station. We participate in programs and are likely seeking to grow closer to God, but we have yet to engage in the lives of others and offer our gifts to others.

Us for Us, Here - Inward focused group. Trying to help each other grow spiritually, but reticent to invite others in.

In these kinds of groups we are relationally connected, but inwardly focused. The connectedness and nurture are great, but we are missing the power of service in our lives. It is also very easy to ultimately approach this group in a “You for Me, Here” mentality.

Me for Them, There - The cause chaser. Great heart for service, but trying to change the world alone.

When we are functioning in this way we are quick to research GoFundMe campaigns, wear Tom's shoes, and attend a rally against human trafficking, but we aren't engaging in a Life-giving community. We get a sense of purpose without knowing and being known. Burn out and isolation are frequent. We forget that it is God who is reconciling all things.

Us for Them, There - Distributed church. Strong sense of community, but also a strong sense of common purpose.

In this kind of group we are relationally connected, understanding that Life-giving community is essential, but we are also seeking to use our gifts to bless those outside our group as well. There is a tension between caring for one another and engaging those outside our group, but we seek to live in that tension. When we swing too far away from the tension, then we end up in one of the other quadrants.

APPENDIX 1: CHILDREN AND TEENAGERS

It is a daunting discovery when we realize that, as the Church, we are the ones responsible for supporting parents in discipling the next generation in our distributed churches as well as providing one another with the support, accountability, and grace we need as the spiritual leaders of our children.

How can a distributed church provide this for families?

GOD'S DIRECTION	OUR RESPONSE
<p>Jesus said, ‘Let the little children come to Me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these.’” (Matthew 19:14)</p> <p>“If anyone causes one of these little ones—those who believe in Me—to stumble, it would be better for them to have a large millstone hung around their neck and to be drowned in the depths of the sea.” (Matthew 18:6)</p>	<p>For children and teens: Provide a weekly place for the next generation to learn stories from the Bible and how to apply them.</p>
<p>“Love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength. These commandments that I give you today are to be on your hearts. Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up. Tie them as symbols on your hands and bind them on your foreheads. Write them on the doorframes of your houses and on your gates.” (Deuteronomy 6:5-9)</p> <p>“Join together in following my example, brothers and sisters, and just as you have us as a model, keep your eyes on those who live as we do.” (Philippians 3:17)</p> <p>“Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind; and, love your neighbor as yourself.” (Luke 10:27)</p>	<p>For parents: Encourage parents to embrace the new mindset of being a disciple and making disciples. Their sons and daughters learn how to respond in life by watching how their parents respond in relationships, in conflict, in success, in failure, in disappointment, and in those moments when we give in to temptation.</p> <p>Discipling our sons and daughters is not as simple as developing godly habits such as praying, attending church, or doing acts of service. It is a daily walk where we are modeling the attitude of Christ and the daily navigation of His greatest commandments. (Luke 10:27)</p>

GETTING STARTED

Your distributed church is unique, so in your quest to provide a weekly place for the next generation to learn Bible stories and how to apply them, it may take time to find the best fit. Check out the options below, or design your own plan. With prayerful consideration and some trial and error, you can develop a plan that fulfills our responsibilities to the next generation and our calling as disciples making disciples together.

SEPARATE STUDIES FOR CHILDREN AND ADULTS	SAME STUDY FOR EVERYONE	SAME STUDY WITH BREAKOUT GROUPS FOR CHILDREN, TEENS, ADULTS
<p>In addition to your distributed church gathering, encourage parents to take their children and teens weekly to a traditional church gathering that offers Sunday School classes (such as NACD at Longwood, Mount Dora, or Oviedo) or a local Bible Club (such as Awana (www.awana.org)) to learn Bible stories, how to adapt them to their lives, memorize scripture, and worship with their peers. At your distributed church gathering, include the children and teens in the meal, worship time, and prayer. If your distributed church has an adult Bible study, that would be a good time for the children to enjoy supervised free time, since they have already learned the Bible story and life application at the larger gathering.</p>	<p>At your gathering, include the children and teens in the meal, worship time, and prayer. As a group, read and discuss The Worship, The Word, & The Way take-home devotionals: Daily Way and/or Ponder, Pray & Play. Then, to allow adults to have more mature conversations, the teens can organize a recreational time for the younger children. The take-home devotionals (Daily Way/Ponder, Play & Pray) can be downloaded from ResourceWell.org/children-ministry.</p>	<p>Lifeway offers three studies, each with separate workbooks for children, teens, and adults, so that every age may study the selected topic on their own level. The three Bible studies are Explore the Bible (book by book), Bible Studies for Life (navigating everyday issues), and The Gospel Project (understanding the whole story of scripture). This reasonably priced curriculum offers a variety of elements including a study plan for every age, interactive iOS and Android apps, media components, online helps, and Family Connection take-home tools. For more information, go to www.Lifeway.com/go.</p>
<p>At your gathering, include the children and teens in the meal, worship time, Bible reading, and prayer. During the adult Bible study, have one adult teach the children and teens a Bible story using The Worship, The Word & The Way curriculum (available at ResourceWell.org/children-ministry).</p> <p>This free downloadable curriculum explores the stories of God from Genesis to Revelation in a three-year cycle. Adaptable elements include Bible readings, discussions, crafts, games, puppet sketches, and online videos of the sketches as seen in Northland's Children's Church. We suggest having a few adults alternate as teachers, so everyone can regularly take part in the adult fellowship. Northland's global curriculum team is available to train and help you adapt it the curriculum to your specific needs. Adaptations for children with disabilities are also available.</p>	<p>Download the free Scope & Sequence of The Worship, The Word & The Way from ResourceWell.org. Use this guide to select Bible stories (appropriate for all ages) for everyone in your distributed church to walk through the Bible together from Genesis to Revelation. For ideas on discussion topics and life applications, be sure to check out the teacher guides and take-home devotionals for each Bible story.</p>	<p>American Bible Society publishes 30-day studies for all ages as well as for families.</p> <p>In Bible Trek: LUKE, all ages go through the book of Luke together. You'll find daily devotionals for every age as well as a Family Discussion Guide at www.NowLuke.com</p> <p>Acts TRACKS, a study of Acts, is available at NowIsTheTime.AmericanBible.org</p> <p>Both studies are available online as well as in magazine format at www.Bibles.com</p> <p>Include everyone in the meal, worship time, Bible reading, and prayer. After reading the passage from Acts together, adults, teenagers, and children can break out to study the meaning at their own level.</p>

SEPARATE STUDIES FOR CHILDREN AND ADULTS	SAME STUDY FOR EVERYONE	SAME STUDY WITH BREAKOUT GROUPS FOR CHILDREN, TEENS, ADULTS
<p>Include all ages in the meal, worship time, and prayer. While the adults participate in their devotional/discussion, an adult or older teenager can read and visually illustrate a Bible story using the KIDStory storyboard and Bible curriculum. This curriculum includes a Bible story discussion using the Socratic teaching approach. It can be purchased from www.kidsaroundtheworld.com.</p>	<p>Adapt the KIDStory Bible curriculum for everyone in your distributed church to walk through the Bible together from Genesis to Revelation. Worship together and discuss the story's life applications over a meal. Allow time at the end for adults to have further discussion while the children and teens enjoy recreational play. This curriculum includes a Bible story discussion that uses the Socratic teaching approach. It can be purchased at www.kidsaroundtheworld.com.</p>	
<p>Include all ages in the meal, worship time, and prayer. If the adults are participating in The First Principles Series study (www.Bild.org), one adult could lead the children in The Apostles' Creed Study available at www.ResourceWell.org/children-ministry/other, or the Young Disciples Series, which will also be available at www.ResourceWell.org.</p>		

Choosing Curriculum: When selecting curriculum for adults, teens, or children, check to see whether the curriculum seems to be more God-centered or man-centered. For example, if the overview or table of contents focuses on who God is, what He has done, and how we can serve and love Him according to His Word, that will serve your church better than one that focuses on the human heroes of the faith and how to be more like them.

More about teenagers: Know your teens... the teenage years are not one-size fits all! Take the time to ensure that each teenager in your gathering has the opportunity to grow, learn, and to be lead. Some teenagers learn best by teaching the younger children. Some need time with peers or time alone to discover ways to apply God's Word to their lives. Be flexible in adapting any of the options above.

For more information on ways to serve the families in your distributed church, go to: www.resourcewell.org.

APPENDIX 2: KEY QUESTIONS FOR ESTABLISHING A CHURCH

The following eight questions serve as prompts for the different elements needed in properly establishing a distributed church.

1. Who will be your core leadership team?

Who immediately comes to mind as someone that would love to be in this with you? In addition to sharing responsibility for the church in general, who can help you:

- Host
- Oversee food
- Teach and facilitate discussion
- Organize service
- Lead the communication with the group
- Plan for the children; Teach the children

Leadership needs to be shared so that the churches are lightweight and easy to manage. Shared responsibility also fosters the kind of community into which you are able to invite others, and models every member participation.

2. Who will you begin to invite into your extended spiritual family?

Who are the people that God is already bringing your way? Existing relationships that could find new expression and meaning in this context? (friends, hobby groups, work groups, school groups, neighbors) People you think could easily be engaged around this idea? Think about people with whom you could share the Gospel as well as those that aren't as connected as they would like.

3. Who is your “for Them, There”?

God has called the church to a purpose beyond itself because He has wired us to be a part of something bigger than ourselves. Pursuing that common purpose draws us together as a community and we experience the kind of relationships for which we were created. That is why identifying the people God has given your church the opportunity to serve is important, not just to reflect His image, but also because it draws people together at a greater depth.

The mission of your church is to make disciples. Serving others is a key means to accomplishing that mission. Are there people or groups with whom you are already in relationship that could be served in a new way with the full resources of your church family? It could be your neighbors, co-workers, local organizations (schools), or even a hobby group where you could contribute together. Or, think about the gaps and segments of society that the church doesn't currently serve, or serves but the need is overwhelming: the homeless, hungry kids, those who are addicted, etc.

4. How will you establish or re-establish everyone in their faith and establish your church?

Will you walk through the First Principles series in your church gathering or in a small group that happens outside your church gathering? If your group includes children, how will you partner with the parents to disciple the children? (See Appendix 1 for resources)

In addition to giving you intentional discipleship and training by studying the key principles of following Jesus, the First Principles series will serve as a guide to establishing your church and creating a shared understanding for what it means to be the church. The series is often mistaken for a basic Bible study or devotional, but its primary purpose is to help a distributed church develop “a basic grasp of who they are as a believing community and how they fit into the plans and purposes of God”. In existing groups, it often works as a process of accidental church planting. (Note: you can use First Principles in your church gathering without necessarily getting out the book during the time together... the key leadership does the prep work and everyone talks about the Scripture when together.)

5. What will be your rhythms for gathering?

Work with your leadership team to think through the calendar implications. Initially the distributed church gathering around a meal works well; then figure out other layers to the gathering rhythms. Will you develop small groups (possibly for First Principles) that will happen outside the organized time? Will you periodically devote your gathering to a specific element? (service project, cookout for neighbors, etc) Try to think across a monthly or quarterly spectrum instead of a weekly spectrum. Everything doesn't have to fit into each week, especially as people are transitioning to this way of life and adjusting their calendars.

6. How will you facilitate “us” outside of the gathering?

How will you develop the organic connections between gatherings to move the church toward becoming a spiritual family? Are there ways you can pursue relationships with people, or foster relationships outside the organized gathering? The gathering will be a good starting point, but fully establishing your church likely will require initiative beyond scheduling the organized gathering. Text messages to say hello, listen for events happening within families and show up in support, have a consistent Bible reading plan, beach trip, etc. Could you also periodically dedicate some portion of your organized time toward this goal?

7. How will you identify and encourage each person in your church to use their gifts?

The goal is that every person participates and contributes in the life of the distributed church. God has gifted all of us for ministry and mission. How will you help people identify those gifts and encourage them to use their gifts? What are the things people are good at? What are the things they love? What are the things you can pray about as a community?

If you have children and/or teenagers in your distributed church, how will they be encouraged to develop and use their gifts as well? (1 Tim. 4:12)

8. What is your strategy for multiplying new churches?

The specific methods can look different based on the context and the unique gifting of individuals, but it is important to establish the DNA of spontaneous expansion from the beginning.

Multiplication, instead of something to be celebrated, can seem threatening to a group of people if not established as a goal from the beginning. Will the catalytic leader move on to start a new church as soon as this one has capable leadership? Will this entire church come alongside other potential leaders to help them start a church? Will emerging leaders from within your church be commissioned to start churches? Will you engage in all three practices?

APPENDIX 3: EXPANDED DISCUSSION OF THE GATHERING

Let's spend a little time breaking down the elements of a distributed church gathering more fully, so you have a better picture of the reason for including each in the gathering. Does every element have to be included every time? No. Sometimes the Holy Spirit moves in a unique way and we must stay sensitive to His leading. But, this structure, modeled after Paul's instructions to the churches in the Epistles, forms a basic template for the flow of a distributed church gathering.

1 - A Home

We have modeled our weekly gatherings after the principles of the meetings of the Early Church (Acts 2:42, Acts 20:7-11). Based on this pattern our distributed churches meet in homes, or other spaces that can accommodate the key elements of the time together. Homes are strategic as they position the activity of the church closer to the people we are seeking to serve.

2 - A Meal: The Lord's Supper

Every distributed church gathering continues in the New Testament tradition of meeting together over a meal, when possible, that celebrates the sacrament of communion. The meal is significant to the Church because it connects believers to the past, present, and future provision of Christ. This is an activity that began in Acts 2:42 - the fellowship and breaking of bread from house to house - and is a key part of what fed the spontaneous expansion of the Early Church. We follow this same pattern today. While we have grown accustomed to the sacrament of communion as an efficient partaking of wafer and cup, in the distributed church gathering we return to the heart of the Lord's Supper as a full meal, shared in community, serving as a reminder of the presence of Jesus in the life of each person, and the community.

This concept was fully developed in Paul's instruction about the "Lord's Supper" to all the churches in 1 Corinthians 11, becoming synonymous with the believers meeting together for a meal - to "break bread." They gathered together for the purpose of observing the Lord's Supper and that term - The Lord's Supper - was used to symbolize the whole meeting.

3 - A Devotion to Scripture and Prayer

Following the meal, the gathering transitions to a more structured time of discussion and instruction, which is overseen by the leadership of that distributed church. As Paul repeatedly reminds the early churches, there are a variety of gifts necessary for the church to function together and each person is encouraged to use their gifts to contribute to the meeting. Opportunities are available for all for the strengthening of the church through their participation. Contribution to this more structured time could take any of the following forms:

- **Scripture** - Teaching in the distributed church is in the form of dialogue meant to engage the inquiring mind, as opposed to lecture, and is designed to orient the community toward Christ, "the author and perfecter of our faith." A teaching can be presented as a result of new understanding or insights that have been gained as the Spirit works in the minds, and lives, of the individuals to uncover truth based on the mind of Christ. A Scripture can be shared along with a story or testimony that serves as a reminder of God's faithful work in the community, family, and individual lives. An individual, family, or community problem may be presented to the group to seek to understand biblical principles and how they apply to that issue.
- **Prayer** - A focused prayer time on community or global issues, the mission of the church, needs in the church, commissioning leaders, or to dialogue with and worship God.
- **Songs, hymns, or other artistic expressions** - Song, poetry, written prayer, visual art, etc. that has emerged as an individual is processing truth and seeking to celebrate who God is, what God has done, and what God is doing. (1 Cor. 14:26, 29)
- **Opportunities of the distributed church** - A discussion may be necessary to respond to opportunities to include the unincluded, start new churches, plan for organized projects to serve the community, discuss important details related to the regular gathering of the community, discuss tithing or needs and opportunities in the community that require financial support, discuss how to care for one another in practical ways through the week, etc.
- **Network-wide communication from Northland's leadership** - Time and attention may be required to solve or correct issues within the church network or simply to ensure that community dialogue is taking place on important issues.

Through the oversight of the leadership of each church the emphasis is on constant discernment for what each particular community is experiencing and needs. While on the one hand no two church gatherings will be identical - it is an extended family of uniquely gifted people - we also aim for every distributed church to be accomplishing the same purpose and living by the same principles.

4 - A Desire To Include the Unincluded

The Scriptures are full of stories that show God's heart to include those who are not yet included. As each distributed church gathers to celebrate the resurrection of Jesus, with the Word richly dwelling in their midst and pouring back out in their lives together, the gathering becomes a catalyst to love and serve the wider community. Embedded in the very nature of every distributed church is the desire to see the gospel lived out everywhere, every day, and the belief that, as a result, the community will grow as the Lord adds to their number. Through authentic relationships and the wise activity and proclamation of believers, God has consistently drawn more people to Himself and expanded His Church.

- Each church is in prayer for those who are not yet included.
- The church community seeks to find ways to live out the Gospel in their context of work, school, neighborhoods, and local area. This happens via the dynamic activity of each individual, the intentional activity of the church together, or a collective effort from the full network of churches.

- Each church is open to new people joining and helps new converts become established in their faith. This might include baptizing new believers and teaching the foundational principles of what it means to be a disciple of Jesus.
- Each church believes that as it grows, God will provide leadership to birth new churches. If the time comes where a church has maxed out its room capacity or there is an opportunity to more effectively reach a new group of people, there is an anticipation that new leadership will emerge. The multiplication of churches is birthed through commissioning, training, and sending new leadership to start a new distributed church.

APPENDIX 4: ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Big Picture Principles

Church Distributed, by Joel C Hunter

Rooted and Grounded, by Abraham Kuyper

Conversion, Culture, and Cognitive Categories, by Paul Hiebert

Linked: How Everything Is Connected to Everything Else and What It Means for Business, Science, and Everyday Life, by Albert-laszlo Barabasi

Early Church Scholarship

House Church and Mission: The Importance of Household Structures in Early Christianity, by Roger W. Gehring

Going to Church in the First Century, by Robert Banks and Judith Clingan

The Churches of the First Century, by Jeff Reed, BILD International

Kerygmatic Communities: Evangelism and the Early Churches, by Jeff Reed, BILD International

Evangelism - Establishing - Entrusting

www.resourcewell.org - a compilation of resources specific to distributing the church.

The Leadership Series, by BILD International

Growing Local Missionaries, by Dan Steigerwald