

# CHURCH STRUCTURES AND PRINCIPLES

---

## **Why we do things the way we do**

So you've been checking out The Village and perhaps you've wondered why we do things the way we do. I'm glad you asked! Every local church has certain goals, and a strategy for accomplishing those goals. It also has structures and methods by which it carries out this strategy. We've determined these things based on biblical data with sound interpretive principles.

## **The Key Structures of the Village Organic Church Network**

- Disciple Making
  - Disciple-Focused Cell Groups
  - Corporate Prayer Meetings
  - Content Rich and Relational House Church
  - Parties with a Purpose
  - Excellent, Expository, Evidenced Based Central Teaching
  - Equipping-Focused Leadership
  - Sophisticated and Strenuous Equipping Classes (LTC)
  - Every Member Ministry
  - Annual Strategic Pledge System
  - Open Financial Policy
-

---

## Disciple Making

Our focus is on making disciples of Jesus because this is what Jesus told us to do! Matthew 28:18-20 is known as the great commission. These are Jesus' last words before he ascended to heaven.

***Jesus came near and said to them, "All authority has been given to me in heaven and on earth. 19 Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, 20 teaching them to observe everything I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age.***

In this text, Jesus says making disciples is the primary calling on our life. A **disciple** is simply someone who believes in Jesus and seeks to follow him in his or her daily life. Making disciples is a multi-level process. The first step to make a disciple is to help people who don't follow Jesus make an informed decision to accept Jesus' death and resurrection in a personal way and commit to following Jesus' teachings. "Baptizo" is the Greek word meaning "put into". Therefore, Jesus is saying "put people into" the name of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. This is what the Bible calls "accepting Christ" or "becoming a Christian."

**Evangelism** is the term used for Christians taking the good news of Jesus' love to others in hopes that they would accept Jesus as Savior. Evangelism is usually not a one-time conversation with someone. It is almost always a series of multiple events involving a message, medium, sender, receiver and noise. The message is the content of the good news and can be summed up by Paul's writing in 1 Corinthians 15:3-8:

***For I delivered to you as first importance what I also received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, "That he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures, and***

---

***that he appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve. Then he appeared to more than five hundred brothers at one time, most of whom are still alive, though some have fallen asleep. Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles. Last of all, as to one untimely born, he appeared also to me.***

This message requires that the receiver responds to it in order to reap the benefits. The medium in which the message is sent can be humans, creation, the Bible, the incarnate word, a believers lifestyle, and the corporate life of fellowship. These things still need to involve a clear message explaining the gospel; for example, you can't just see how a believer is living and understand the whole gospel message. The sender of this message is a follower of Jesus and the receiver is not. Unfortunately, there can be all kinds of noise that gets in the way of message getting through clearly like sin issues in the sender's life or preconceived ideas of the receiver, eg. the belief that there is no absolute truth.

Here are practical ways that we can help others accept Jesus as their Savior:

- Share the message of Jesus
- Dialogue over the message
- Create a welcoming & loving culture that values investigation & curiosity
- Recognize such an identity-change is a big deal that takes time & conversation
- Tackling real hurdles to belief

The next phase in the evangelism process is **follow up**. The term follow up can be used in two ways. It is the process of helping someone move from curiosity to commitment or conversion to commitment. Follow up is the engine that drives the process of evangelism and it needs to be strategized and planned. This planning can be done by the cell group leaders (cell is our disciple focused small groups which are described in more detail later) or at cell group itself. Initial follow up is the communication with new guests at a meeting and can be done by any cell group

---

member. Ongoing follow up may last weeks or months and is accomplished by the person appointed. The person is appointed to ongoing follow up based on past effectiveness of disciple making, rewarding the bringer, how many people they already disciple and trying to keep follow up within the same sphere of relationships (e.g. trying to get couples with couples if possible). Key elements to follow up are communication among the cell, being prayerfully attuned to the spirit, being observant to the guests and initiating action.

Examples of things to say to or ask a new person are:

- "What did you think about the teaching?"
- "So it seems like you are saying \_\_\_\_. Am I hearing you correctly?"
- "Last time we chatted about \_\_\_\_\_. Can you tell me more about that?"

Another stage in the process of disciple making is teaching those who have already decided to follow Jesus how to grow in their relationship with Jesus. Jesus says we should teach disciples to follow Him "in all things." The Village does these things through healthily relating in one on one meetings, parties with a purpose, House church meetings, Central Teaching meetings, cell group meetings and Leadership Training Classes. We will describe one on one discipleship relationships here and the others in the list will be explained as you continue to read.

- One on one discipleship relationship
  - The discipleship relationship is usually between two people where one person is leading another because they are a bit further down the road in their relationship with Jesus--although at times (usually when the believers are fairly mature in their faith) there can be peer to peer discipleship.
  - Usually meets on a weekly basis
  - Discipleship meeting is typically about an hour and a half and includes Bible or book study, sharing about life, coaching in personal ministry of disciple making and prayer.

- 
- Does not last forever. There does come a time when a person transitions from this relationship because of either a House church plant or the disciple maturing to the point where it is more of a co-laborer relationship.

## **Disciple Focused Cell Groups**

Our cell groups are devoted to discipleship and spiritual growth. They are same-sexed groups made up of about four to 10 that meet weekly or every other week. Cell groups are typically for Christian believers only because our other meetings are open to and seek to engage non Christians. This gives the believers a place to relate to one another in a way where they don't have to be careful about making a non-believer uncomfortable eg. using biblical language. Cell groups usually have a fairly aggressive study schedule of the Bible or a Christian book, collaborate on personal ministry (especially follow up with new attendees to the House Church) and they usually share and pray for each other as well. Folks are invited into cell group when they are disciples of Christ, being discipled in a one on one relationship, and committed to The Village as their church body.

## **Corporate Prayer Meetings**

Prayer meetings could be the most important meeting we have! Each house church has an established prayer meeting without non-Christians present. Usually, those who are in cell group are those who are invited to the prayer meeting. This is generally directed towards praying for the folks that people are trying to have spiritual conversations with or invite to meetings. We intentionally pray in a focused, conversational way and try to avoid one person praying for very long.

## **Content Rich and Relational House Church**

Jesus says in John 13: 34-35, ***"I give you a new command: Love one another. Just as I have loved you, you are also to love one another. 35 By this everyone will know***

---

***that you are my disciples, if you love one another.***” Our structure to create gatherings that have quality content and loving relationships is House Church.

**House Church** meetings are devoted to sharing about God with people investigating Christianity as well as those devoted to spiritual growth. The groups are usually 12 to up to 60 adults. House churches are open to non-Christian guests, and are intended to be small to medium sized communities. Our house churches are named to distinguish the group from other house churches.

The Village has a personal relationship with the leaders of a large church in Columbus, Ohio called Xenos that we model our church after. Xenos originated during the so-called "Jesus Movement" of the late 60's and early 70's. Like many groups originating at that time, Xenos leaders were fascinated by the concept of underground Christianity. An underground church, in their view, would get rid of features of church life born of tradition, and would go back to the primitive Christianity of the book of Acts. Such a body would meet both in large meetings and in homes (Acts. 2:46; 20:20), and spread primarily by multiplication of home groups, rather than by large, auditorium-based meetings delivered by professionals.

The key to an underground approach is not finding the most attractive preacher, the best worship bands, or producing the best dramatic productions and facilities. Instead, the key becomes personal discipleship and equipping, leading to many qualified lay leaders capable of planting new groups. Although an underground approach would see nothing wrong with "above ground" approaches like big seekers' meetings, these would not be at the center of church life or growth. In fact, an underground group could dispense with all large meetings and still advance, just like the house church in China has done for the past fifty years.

The goal is that our house churches will grow so that another house church is started (planted). In the Village, church planting is based on all-volunteer leadership

---

teams. These teams of leaders serve as "tentmakers" earning their livings at secular careers. They are trained locally while practicing ministry and working at careers. They develop the core of their new home church within another home church in the area. When they plant a new group, they take along a number of fellow members from the original group, some of whom are already partially trained. They meet in a home and immediately begin building toward their own church plant, normally three years later.

### **Parties with a Purpose**

We encourage our folks to have informal get-togethers where we seek to invite new people. These could be parties, golfing, hiking, sitting around a fire pit, watching movies, going to sporting events, etc.

### **Excellent, expository, evidenced based Central Teaching**

First, it's important to note that home groups are the focus of The Village Organic Church's structure. But we also believe that a large meeting can uniquely accomplish certain elements of the Christian life that we see pictured in the New Testament.

For instance, the early churches met in houses but also came together in large meetings to hear the teachings of the apostles. Strong, culturally relevant Bible teachings are the focal point of these larger meetings we call **Central Teachings (CTs)**. CTs provide a setting in which adults hear God's word taught through highly gifted and trained teachers. Multiple house churches come together, often bringing friends and family who want to have their questions answered about Christianity.

Our facility helps to set an informal, non-traditional atmosphere in which Christians and non-Christians alike can relax. People are welcome to take coffee, pop and

---

snacks into the space, while they hear what God might want to say to them through his word.

CTs start with prayer, followed by an expository Bible teaching that lasts about 40 to 50 minutes taught by our lead pastor and occasionally an elder. After the teaching, people can ask questions using microphones, or wait until the meeting concludes to privately talk with the teacher. We close the meeting with prayer. We also provide recordings of the teachings on our Youtube channel which can be found on our website [www.thevillageocn.com](http://www.thevillageocn.com) .

Our meetings are not “worship services,” as you might typically think of. The Village takes a somewhat unusual but biblical view of what worship is in the New Testament. In his letter to the Romans, Paul agrees "worship" should be the most important thing, but he paints a very different picture of what worship is. Paul instructs, ***"I urge you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, which is your spiritual service of worship."*** (Romans 12:1). Paul teaches us that New Testament worship should center on a daily lifestyle, not a weekly service. By avoiding worship at the large meetings, we think we avoid making non Christians feel obligated to sing songs of praise to a God in whom they don't believe. At the same time, Christians from other churches might be reluctant to transfer to The Village because they expect a musical worship service. We welcome worship through music at cell group or if a cell group member wanted to start a worship through music meeting apart from CT or house church. Furthermore, [communion](#) is not shared at our large meetings. We felt that cell groups are much more appropriate for this intimate act of worship.

In parallel with our Central Teaching meeting times for adults, we also offer excellent programs on-site for infants, toddlers, and school-aged children, called “The Garden”. Junior high and High school students are invited to join the adults in



---

the main central teaching and we are working to launch and build youth and college ministries.

## **Equipping-Focused Leadership**

We believe that Christian equipping is and should be thorough and rigorous. Some people think this is crazy... insisting that thorough and rigorous equipping is unrealistic for modern busy people. We view that thinking as out of touch with the realities of God's purposes and the spiritual war being waged. It is ludicrous because it reveals a double-standard when thinking about secular work and spiritual work. In nearly every secular field of work, extensive training and learning is an unquestioned requirement! Most people would not think of entrusting themselves to an untrained doctor. Very few rational people would hire an untrained and unproven electrician to rewire their house. How much more should we expect thorough training and proven effectiveness from people claiming to speak for God and call others to follow Him!

Paul lays out the priority of equipping Christians in Ephesians 4:11-16:

***He personally gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors and teachers, 12 for the training of the saints in the work of ministry, to build up the body of Christ, 13 until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of God's Son, growing into a mature man with a stature measured by Christ's fullness. 14 Then we will no longer be little children, tossed by the waves and blown around by every wind of teaching, by human cunning with cleverness in the techniques of deceit. 15 But speaking the truth in love, let us grow in every way into Him who is the head—Christ. 16 From Him the whole body, fitted and knit together by every supporting ligament, promotes the growth of the body for building up itself in love by the proper working of each individual part.***

---

Within The Village, equipping is a multi-faceted and life-long process which includes the following:

- Studying God's word and quality Christian literature, podcasts, teachings, etc.
- Participating as an engaged learner at our rich in content meetings.

### **Sophisticated and Strenuous Equipping Classes (Leadership Training Course)**

We also see value in utilizing quality equipping classes, and find a biblical basis for such classes in Acts 19: 8:

***Paul entered the synagogue and spoke boldly over a period of three months, arguing and persuading them about the kingdom of God. 9 But when some became hardened and would not believe, slandering the Way in front of the crowd, he withdrew from them, taking the disciples, and conducted discussions every day in the lecture hall of Tyrannus. 10 This went on for two years, so that all the residents of Asia, both Jews and Greeks, heard the word of the Lord.***

The following page shows the current **Leadership Training Class (LTC)** Plan of Study.



### LTC 1: THE BIBLE

- inspiration
- canonicity
- interpretation
- OT & NT
- personal prioritization of feeding on the Word



### LTC 2: APOLOGETICS

- evidential & presuppositional arguments & evidence
- evolution & creation
- world religions
- postmodernism
- learning to think critically



### LTC 3: SYSTEMATIC THEOLOGY

- attributes of God
- Christology
- Pneumatology
- Anthropology
- Satanology



### LTC 4: CHRISTIAN GROWTH PRINCIPLES

- sanctification vs. justification
- means of growth
- ethics & morality
- choosing to live as a disciple
- perseverance



### LTC 5: ECCLESIOLOGY

- polity & authority
- ethos & character
- worship
- finances
- one-anothers



### LTC 6: CHRISTIAN MINISTRY PRINCIPLES

- God's part & our part
- evangelism, follow-up, & discipleship
- encouragement & admonition
- confidentiality & conferral
- teaching through guided discussion



### LTC 7: ESCHATOLOGY

- importance of studying prophecy
- critique of eschatological systems
- How will things play out? What can we know?
- "Therefore, encourage one another with these things."

---

## Every Member Ministry

In Christianity, ministry is an activity carried out by Christians to express or spread their faith. Some ministries are identified formally as such, and some are not; some ministry is directed towards members of the church, and some towards non-members. We argue the case that God's will and his provision for every Christian includes ministry. Ministry is not just for paid staff and is not optional in the Christian life. It is a means of growth, just like prayer, scripture, and fellowship.

Our vision is to develop a church where the vast majority of the ministry is performed by well-trained, unpaid, volunteer workers and leaders. Team-Led House Churches are at the core of our ministry structure. Weddings, Baptisms and Funerals will be typically performed by House Church leaders rather than by specialized paid staff. We believe that this model of ministry will not only be most effective in equipping and reaching the most people, but also that it is the biblically-prescribed method of ministry (Ephesians 4:11-16; 1 Peter 2:9-12; Romans 12:1-8). People become leaders in the Village by demonstrating faithfulness in leading themselves in their relationship with God, reaching out to others, making disciples and eventually teaching. This principle comes from Luke 16:10, ***"One who is faithful in a very little is also faithful in much, and one who is dishonest in a very little is also dishonest in much."***

## Annual Strategic Pledge System

We do not pass a basket in our meetings to collect money, but once a year ask our regular and committed attenders to fill out a pledge card so that the church can budget for the year. The Bible teaches us that we should pool our money together as a church. The first reason we pool our money is that this is the example given to us in the Bible. Acts 4:32 says, ***"All the believers were united in heart and mind. And they felt that what they owned was not their own. So they shared everything they had."*** Moreover, ***"There were no needy people among them, because those***

---

**who owned land or houses would sell them and bring the money to the apostles to give to those in need”** (Acts 32:34-35). Jesus also taught that we should give our money anonymously (Matthew 6:3-4) which leads us to believe we should give more indirectly most of the time. Rather than handing their money to those in need, believers can give their gifts to the church leadership and have it indirectly given to others. The third reason we pool our money is that the church has its own expenses and believers must trust their money to the group to help pay church needs. Lastly, we pool our money because the church can then meet large needs over lengthy periods. The church leadership can serve as the collectors of the needs in a way that no one individual can.

If we want to avoid becoming enmeshed in materialism, we need to cultivate a godly way to handle our money and material possessions. Our perspective on material and spiritual things is important. **“For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.”** (Matthew 6:21).

### **Open Financial Policy**

Are you interested in how The Village allocates the money people give? We would love to show you if you are interested! Talk to or email Stu Heckman at [stuheckman@gmail.com](mailto:stuheckman@gmail.com). Every church's use of money is a crucial part of its witness to the watching world, as well as to its own members. Through the handling of God's resources, we teach people in the church what the heart of God is like. The apostle Paul says he always takes **“precaution so that no one will discredit us in our administration of this generous gift; for we have regard for what is honorable, not only in sight of the Lord, but also in the sight of men”** (2 Corinthians 8:20-21). Paul is saying that the church should not only handle their money devoted to God in an honorable way, but that we should also be able and ready to prove that we have done so.

---

**Please see our website at [thevillageocn.com](http://thevillageocn.com) under resources for articles on:**

[Women in Ministry](#)

[The Bible and Profanity](#)

[Morality Makers or Made to be Moral](#)

[Developing a Discipleship Culture](#)

[Becoming an Equipped Christian Worker](#)

[The Bible and Profanity](#)

[Lord's Supper](#)

\*Some of the information in this packet is adapted from [Xenos.org](http://Xenos.org), *Members of One Another* by Dennis McCallum and teachings by Todd Stewart.