

OIKOS *Australia*



Encouraging Home Churches

Volume 15 No 1

Autumn 2006

\$5



***In Perth—A beautiful home church wedding —with a difference.
And if you are worried this footwashing only happened as a
one-sided activity—turn to page 8***

***Also in this issue—
A take on home church by home church leaders in Quirindi,
Perth, Mareeba and America.....***

“They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, praising God and enjoying the favour of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved.”

Mission Statement

OIKOS Australia Inc. is a servant ministry seeking to advance God's Kingdom purposes in our land by supporting and encouraging home churches both within and independent of the traditional church.

We do this through:

- provision of relevant news and information
- quarterly newsletter
- personal contact
- pastoral care
- seminars and speaking engagements

Our Vision

To network and encourage the new ways of ‘being church’ that God is bringing about in Australia today

General Overview and Philosophy

OIKOS is the Greek word used in the Bible for ‘household’. In Romans 16:3-5 for example, reference is made to the church that meets in a home.

OIKOS is a friendship and encouragement vehicle for new ways of church and for individual Christians who are ‘out on a limb’.

Home churches are varied. The home church ethos is to be found in grassroots gatherings in offices, factories, aged facilities, prisons and even car parks. It's not the venue that is descriptive, but rather the way of ‘being church’.

About OIKOS

OIKOS endeavours to encourage churches that are non hierarchical and grassroots, and who gather in small groups to enable relationships to develop and go deep.

There is a fresh move of the Holy Spirit changing the way of being ‘church’ back to ways that the first Christians would have recognised. This is the movement we seek to follow and serve.

Part of this work is via **the newsletter**. We see this as a means for sharing news and information. It is not a magazine. It does not have a doctrinal statement as such and in fact tries not to venture into doctrinal issues to any depth. It is not an academic paper, but seeks to be newsy, encouraging and homespun.

OIKOS is not a ‘covering’ for home churches. We believe Jesus Christ is the ‘covering’ for His church and no other is needed.

OIKOS does not run home churches and has no authority over any home church or any other gathering of Christians.

We provide ideas and resources if requested and if available. We can usually put enquirers in touch with people who might be helpful.

OIKOS some-
times supports

and encourages the beginnings of home churches but then moves aside for the group to develop in the way God would have. We continue as a friend if the group so wishes.

As to how OIKOS works,

Bessie Pereira is the director of OIKOS Australia Inc. She is accountable to a Team that meets monthly.

FUNDAMENTALLY,

OIKOS is called to glorify Jesus Christ, and to be a servant ministry to the church in our day. We believe that God is calling individual Christians

- to realise His life within them,
- to come together under His Lordship
- to be the Church where He has planted them,
- to reach out as a Kingdom people so that the world will truly know that Jesus lives.

OIKOS TEAM 2006

Director Bessie Pereira

Treasurer Ed Bishop (Vic)

Secretary Joan Grinlaw (Vic)

Carl Fechner (Vic)

Bruce Kerr (Qld)

Des Stewart (NSW)

Sue Snare (Tas)

CONSULTANTS

Rev. Dr. David R. Wilson

Director of Urban Encounter

Former Principal of

Kingsley College

Alan Hirsch

National Director of Forge
Mission Training Network.

Acts 2:46-47

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From the Editor...

Momentum is gathering on the home church front! I hear of more groups happening these days. This is in line with what God is doing across the world including in western nations.

In prayerfully focusing on OIKOS for 2006, I believe to emphasise three areas.

1. The need to get back to the Sermon on the Mount as the basis of our discipleship. We need also to have a Kingdom focus. Jesus said "My Kingdom is not of this world." There is a lot of confusion as to what it takes to be seriously committed to Jesus and how we live this out in the world in which we see ourselves. In John 17 we see Jesus praying for us as sent into the world but being not of it.
2. The need to be gathered together to grow and equip one another for the Kingdom's purposes. Church life is relationships—the 'one anothers' such as 'love one another', 'serve one another'. See the web page for a long list of these. I would encourage home churches to read these from time to time as a check on the quality of church life that builds us for the Kingdom. Christians need 'one another'. If we are isolated, we don't grow or grow others in the biblical way. Hebrews 10:25.
3. The 'Great Commission' of Matthew 28:16-end. This is the mandate of the Kingdom. For a home church to ignore this is to assign it to become a

'bless me club', 'us 4 and no more' and will lead to the demise of the group eventually. In some way, we need to come to grips with what it means to be effective 'salt' and 'light'. Matthew 5 & 6.

I know many home churches are seeing the work of the Holy Spirit encouraging them in these three Kingdom issues. OIKOS would love to publish articles, stories and photos that will encourage and bless others in home churches.

There is a 'stepping up' and we need be serious before God. Home church is much more than a change in the shape of the building we meet in or the size of the gathering. God is bringing about a fundamental change in the way church is focused. I believe the three areas listed above are the core issues. Meeting in small lounge-room sized groups enhances the possibility for these three values to be lived out realistically at the grassroots level in our communities.

From Monday to Friday, I pray for home churches (3-4 a day) naming names and needs before God as I have them. Let me know anything specific you want me to pray for, and I promise I will. PRAYER IS VITAL.

Blessings,

Bessie

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Meat or Vegetables.....



*Des Stewart,
Quirindi
Christian
Fellowship,
N.S.W.*

One of the exciting things about house church is the kaleidoscope of people that go to make up a fellowship.

Of course this can lead to disharmony if we try to push our own point of view on certain subjects. Christians have been very good at taking a stand on issues, sometimes to the detriment of the Kingdom of God.

Can you identify with some of these issues that have caused conflict and polarisation in churches?

Playing guitars in church, listening to rock music, women wearing pant suits, smoking, dancing, Sunday sports or any activity on a Sunday outside a religious activity.

How about using any Bible translation other than the King James? Or speaking in tongues? I haven't even mentioned issues of theology or church practice.

Well the list could go on. So how should Christians act towards one another when points of difference arise?

It was just this sort of difference of opinion that the Apostle Paul faced with the church at Rome and Corinth. Here the issue was whether to eat meat or stick with vegetables alone.

In those days most of the meat sold by the local butcher had been offered to idols and then passed over for sale to the public. The question that arose was, "should Christians eat this meat that had been offered to idols or was it better to just stick to vegetables?"

Paul addresses this question in the 14th chapter of Romans and in his letter to the Church at Corinth.

Before we take a look at Paul's advice, let me state that I believe that God gives us certain freedoms in decision making. It is my belief that where the Bible gives no command or principle the believer is free and responsible to choose his own course of action.

There are some courses of action that are not open to Christians i.e. immoral actions, failing to love your neighbour, salvation by faith in Jesus, these are all commanded and the faithful Christian has no choice but to obey.

Learn to distinguish between matters of command and matters of freedom

However when we have no commandment or Biblical principle to follow then we are free to make up our own minds.

So the first principle in decision making when Christians differ is

to learn to distinguish between matters of command and matters of freedom.

Did you notice that most of the issues I mentioned earlier that have caused conflict between Christians are issues that were of concern in years gone by. They

On debatable issues cultivate your own convictions

were issues of their age man made, and part of the custom of the day. Most of them today wouldn't be a concern. Women wear pant suits these days and it doesn't raise an eyebrow.


The second principle is on debatable issues cultivate your own convictions Romans 14: 5.

Paul says "each one should be fully convinced in his own mind". We are called to come to a decision in our own minds about debatable issues, recognising that God has given us the freedom to do so. How do we do this? By knowing the character of God, by studying His Word, by listening to the wisdom of mature Christians. We come to a decision through due consideration of all of the above. We are also to come to a decision that we will serve the Lord and not our own desires. Rom 14:6&8.


Paul says we should do this in the light of the fact that one day we will give an account of ourselves. Rom 14:12.

Having made our decision in the light of all of the above we should then be happy with the decision we have made. *“Happy is he who does not condemn himself in what he approves”* Rom 14:22. Being unsettled in one’s mind could actually be a sin against your conscience. Rom 14:23.

Principle number three. Allow



Allow your brother the freedom to determine his own convictions – even if they differ from yours



your brother the freedom to determine his own convictions – even if they differ from yours. This is implicit in the statement *“let each man be fully convinced in his own mind”*. Rom 14:5. It is also developed in detail through the first twelve verses of Romans 14. *“Now accept the one who is weak in faith”* v1. *“Let not him who eats regard with contempt him who does not eat, and let not him who does not eat judge him who does eat, for God has accepted him”*. V3.


Instead of worrying about the differing views of a fellow believer, the mature believer accepts him and lets God deal with his opinions. That is God’s business. He is at work in that person’s life, and He hasn’t finished yet. God’s evaluation of a person’s life comes at the end of the construction project, while fellow Christians tend to critique it at various points along the way.

Fourth principle. Let your liberty be limited, when necessary, by love. Although God gives us the freedom to make our own mind up in matters that are not commanded we should not abuse this freedom. It may seem unfair that another brother’s viewpoint should restrict my freedom. Yet that is the nature of agape love, it is other - centred. This principle does not totally restrict our freedom to hold an opinion; the restriction is ‘when necessary’.


What then would necessitate restricting our freedom? When exercising that freedom would cause our weaker brother to stumble. Rom 14 :13-16, 1 Cor 8:12-13.

If by our actions, or by insisting in exercising our freedom we cause a weaker brother to sin against his conscience, we have sinned.

Paul’s great desire was that the people of God would be able to live in harmony. We are called to *unity in diversity*. We are meant to have a variety of opinions in these areas of freedom that God gives us. This is what adds variety to our fellowship.



Let your liberty be limited, when necessary, by love



However that freedom to hold an opinion is never to be expressed at the expense of our brother stumbling.

“Let us therefore make every effort to do what leads to peace and to mutual edification”

Romans 14:19

Time Magazine article

There’s no Pulpit like Home (an article about Home Church) <http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,1167737,00>

Amazing Revival at Asbury College in Kentucky

Hundreds of students participate in unplanned 5 day chapel prayer service at Asbury College in Kentucky.

<http://www.asbury.edu/press/catalyst06>

www.oikos.org.au
Keep up to date with OIKOS and Home Church happenings.
There is another booklet available to download and fresh information.

Send news and photos of your Home Church to encourage others



Help For the Church Planter..... Kingdom

King-
dom

Carl Musch,
*Indigenous Ministry Links Aus-
tralia.*

Years ago after having planted a couple of “house” style fellowships among Aboriginal people in the Northern Territory, I became very physically sick. This was a combination of witchcraft/spiritual warfare and possibly the emotional stress of trying to do so much in my own strength.

Having just completed Bible College and coming up to graduation, I was called by God to go to the Aboriginal community in Queensland. When I asked Him “to do what?” He said “Teach the things I have taught you of my Spirit.”

Over the next 5 years I did not only limit myself to the Lord’s specific instructions to me. I burdened myself with a lot of expectations of men, and in turn I passed some of the burden onto those I ministered to.

However, finally I heard the voice of the Lord calling me back to the simplicity of my original calling.

Today I am married to a super-human woman called Gail (who joined me in the middle of that 5 years) and have two daughters, Hope (10) and Joy (8). We are what some people call missionaries today - coordinating a network and ministry that God has birthed through us called “Indigenous Ministry Links Australia”, that is involved in Indigenous Christian Leadership Development and Partnering for

growth across Australia, based in Mareeba, far North Queensland. This has been developing over the past eight years.



Over the past 19 years we’ve been involved in planting many churches equipping and supporting many people in their ministries for the Lord.

The main and first truth I felt God lay on my heart to help people succeed in church planting is that very likely the best thing you could do is....STOP TRYING TO START ONE! I’m serious, and remember I am committed to the need for more churches. Before I understood the simple truth that I hope to communicate today, I probably had two “burnouts” in the pioneer-pastoring ministry which I don’t want anyone else to experience.

I loved God, was passionate for souls, had a reasonable grounding in the Bible and theology; and practical training and experience in a broad range of ministries. Furthermore, I realized that existing churches were not going

to be sufficient to reach and transform the lost. But like all of us I had a culture, and even more specifically a “church” culture that had a model of ministry and ministry “heroes” that I tried to emulate maybe more than I was emulating Jesus.

Though I had a measure of visible success in my field by “church world” standards, I was not satisfied. I was overwhelmed at how much *I seemed to be doing* to achieve what seemed of so little eternal value. Or maybe underwhelmed at the level of God’s tangible involvement in it all.

Today, by contrast I have to say that one of my challenges is NOT to start more churches than I can personally, or even find people to disciple. What’s more, probably the hardest place not to start a church is my own home.

Just in this season, I currently restrain myself because I and the people I work with, are stretched too far and wide, working with pioneer church planters to give new believers in my home town, the care they need (which is maybe less than I once thought). Furthermore there are those who are called and committed locally to this task that I know and I need to trust.

You see I love small relational, home based groups of believers working together on the task of being and making disciples of Jesus. Given who Jesus is, nothing is more natural-supernaturally speaking. Jesus said “I will build my church; and the gates of Hades

will not overcome it.” Matt 16:18. This verse needs to become a conviction. Despite what we have seen and maybe been told **Jesus will build his church** because He said He would and He is faithful.

He has given us other specific instructions that need to be our focus like “love Him with all your heart, with all your understanding and with all your strength, and to love your neighbour as yourself is more important than all burnt offerings and sacrifices.” Mark 12:33.

He went on to give us a bit more detail in the loving others bit...Mark 16:15 “Go into all the world and preach the good news...” Why? Because verse 16 says... “Whoever believes ... will be saved; but whoever does not believe will be condemned.

In Matt 28:18-20 He elaborates on the process “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go, and make disciples ...²⁰ and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.”

My point is that we need to rest in faith that Jesus is the BUILDER and is building His church and concentrate on being His “workers” (2 Co 6:1) and “labourers”(Matt 9:37) being focused on the task that we have been given. I’ve been a part of construction teams and seen how counterproductive it is when one of the tradesmen or labourers

starts telling the builder how it should be done. The work is paralysed and often ends up disjointed. Much of what the current house church movement is fueled by is a heart response to church that has been so much the construction of man, rather than the super-natural family of God.

We have the example in scripture of Ishmael being the product of Abraham and Sarah trying to fulfil their God given dream

We simply need to be focused on loving God, loving people, sharing the Gospel, and making disciples

when God didn’t seem to be working to their time schedule. It was Ishmaelites that tried to carry away Joseph, full of godly dreams and visions, into slavery. Ishmaelites (Arab Muslims) have declared jihad on Christians today. The point is that the product of our well-meaning, though misguided works become the enemy of that which is birthed in faith.

If God has given us a dream or vision of leading a house church then let Him bring it to pass. We simply need to be focused on loving God, loving people, sharing the Gospel, and making disciples (by teaching people The Truth that sustains and guides you). God will grow a house church around us if we simply meet with these new disciples in a home!

So my friends let us focus on being the family of God, and disciples of Jesus; and let us let God be God and see how marvellous He is at it. He will build his Church .

House Church Hopefuls.....

By: Timothy L. Price

Church is a subject quickly losing its importance in America (I hear people talk about their church with as much enthusiasm as they talk about their dentist).

House church is gaining momentum. House church is now thought by some to be the “cutting edge” of the current reformation of the church, both within the USA and around the world.

Besides the multi-generation legacy of the house church in oppressive states such as China and Vietnam, this approach to church is quickly becoming the regular experience of millions in many other countries.

The house church trend is taking America by storm. House church has been in practice for a long time, but in the past 5-8 years there has been a precipitous increase in groups moving into this format of church. Two recent books, *The Coming Revolution*, by well-known researcher George Barna, and *The Shaping of Things To Come*, by Alan Hirsch and Mike Frost, have examples and statistics concerning this trend. There is also a plethora of new books, websites, and organisations, popping up all over America, concerning this revised approach to church.

Before we go out and jump off the deep-end, trying to start our own group and thinking we’ll

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A Wedding with a difference.....

Nathan and Nicole Hobby asked me if I would be celebrant at their wedding. I was unused to dealing with weddings from one side of the country to the other, but very quickly realised that this young couple were very involved with the Perth Anabaptist Fellowship (Home Churches) in Perth, and it was natural that they would be prepared for their marriage by the church.

Ian and Ann Duckham and Brad and Marina Schilling in particular, took responsibility for the nurture of Nathan and Nicole in preparation for their marriage, meeting with them regularly and working through issues from a prepared course.

Before and during the wedding, the church was closely involved.

The Wedding Service at Claremont Baptist included the traditional Christian footwashing signifying the servant attitude we are to have one towards another. Ian Duckham read the passage John 13:1, 3-10a, 12-17, Jesus washing the disciples' feet. The well-known hymn 'Brother, Sister, let me serve you Let me be as Christ to you' accompanied the footwashing.

As the couple were prayed for after their actual 'wedding', they were anointed with oil and remained kneeling during the singing - '*O Lord, You're Beautiful. Your face is all I seek. For when your eyes are on this child, Your grace abounds to me*'. This was another 'holy moment'.

The reception was a joyful and worthy proclamation of the dedication of these two young lives brought together by God to be available together for His Kingdom's sake. The church will continue to lovingly support Nathan and Nicole as they move forward in God's purposes for them in their new life together. Ed.



Nathan and Nicole making their vows to one another. The bridesmaid is Christine, a close friend of Nicole's and the best man is Joshua, Nathan's brother.



Without Walls Ministry—Phil and Jeannette Howell (pictured right). A network of twelve home churches around Perth

Below—For the last three years in January, WOW has put up a tent (a larger one each year!) in McCallum Park beside the Swan River in Perth, in which for three nights, worship, the Word and ministry are flowing. About five hundred people attended the last one, from across the church in Perth and many who do not attend a traditional church. They will run a ‘Glory Camp’ in May. No speakers or program, just time with God. More about these groups in the next issue.

About Perth.....



Right—One of the big pluses of home church—they are cross generational. Five week old John Schilling spent lots of time in the arms of one person after another—blissfully sleeping. It was great seeing some of the younger men cuddling this tiny one! Here he is in the arms of Nicole who is acting as a surrogate Aunty!



Left—Peter and Cheryl Fowler. Senior Pastor of a denominational church, called of God to start home churches outside church structures, while in Sydney. Returning to Perth, their home city, he threw out a net to about forty people he thought could be interested. Fourteen men responded. This has become an amazing journey for each as they seek to understand the spirituality which Jesus taught men so that we might live with integrity and make a difference in the world. Peter has had opportunity to expand, but is waiting for God's timing to allow the existing group to move along further before branching out. We will hear more of this in OIKOS soon!

Just Thinking.....

Ross McKinnon, Perth WA
*Ross and Julie can be contacted
 at juromac@optusnet.com.au*



There is much to be excited about in the current church environment. We can see the emerging church actually emerging.

It is not just a tag for a new fad or flavour. We can begin to see the possibility of a vibrant, essential, radical church growing within the obscurity of organic community, of grass-roots, down-to-earth relationship. With our God, and with each other.

This is not a fashion driven vibrancy or radicalism growing out of a flash new way of impressing ourselves. This is something that is growing out of the heart of God. It is expressing itself as a holy dissatisfaction with the status quo, a holy discomfort at being entombed in corporately managed nominalism.

It is like a call of the wild, a primal calling to forsake our man-made structures, our expensive buildings, our self-structured hierarchies and, dare I say, our sense of self-importance and complacency. It is well past time to seek our Creator in His time and space, in His calling, in His way.

This is a call to embrace our Lord in His calling as He builds His church. As we answer this call, we embark on a journey that cannot be understood, at

least as fully as perhaps we'd like. This is a calling we certainly cannot manage or contain, and we certainly cannot control it. Nor should we seek to. It is moving into the unknown. But did we expect it? Did we expect that in answering the call of God, that we would suddenly be faced with finding ourselves square pegs in round holes as our preconceptions came apart at

Did we expect to find ourselves facing something akin to birth pains as we struggled to unlearn our past, and start anew?

the seams? Did we expect to find ourselves anguished by finding those things we have held dear, those things we held important to suddenly have no meaning as our systems began to fail us? Did we expect to find ourselves facing something akin to birth pains as we struggled to unlearn our past, and start anew?

Whether we did or not, there are so many stories emerging of those who've gone through such struggles as the journey has been embraced. To those who've felt as though they've almost lost their marbles as this has swept them along, take heart – you're in good company!

Strangely, the emerging that is taking place is not from the shadows of pagan societies, it's emerging from the very structures that we've been entangled in as Christians for centuries. The big "C" church. These are the institutions, corporations,

and traditions that have been built up around the phenomenon of Constantianism. These are the structures we, ourselves, have built, and that have flowed on in ever-increasingly secularised frameworks. In building these structures, we have created a monster in which the whole is greater than the sum of the parts – taking on a life of its own. We have become ensnared in a trap of our own making.

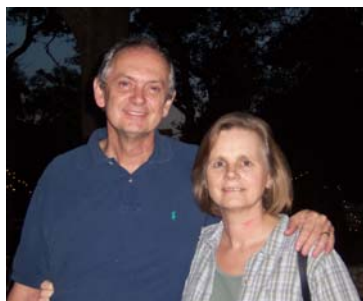
In each revolution of culture the structures and institutions have been confronted, and this questioning and confronting is important. The progress made in understanding as a result of these upheavals is vital. We do indeed stand on the shoulders of those who have gone before. Yet we have habitually reinvented similar structures to replace the previous ones. And in each cycle, have subsequently become entrapped by the very structures we have created. The fundamental mistake is we have not questioned the roots from which our paradigms have grown sufficiently to understand the causes of the difficulties we've been facing. We have built the cities, and the towers, and we have made names for ourselves. Look at the result! Each time our towers collapse, we build more. Maybe with a different roof line or paint scheme, but it's still a tower. Each time, a fresh take on the "Emperor's New Clothes".

Our questioning has not gone back in time far enough. We've questioned back to where our personal discomfort becomes evident, but not to the root causes. And the root causes are

(Continued on page 12)

***Two Regional Gatherings for
Home Churches with
Tony and Felicity Dale of House2House!***

**Brisbane
6th July
Home Church
Forum during
the day.
Evening Open
Gathering.**



**Sydney
12th July with
much the same
format as
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www.house2house.tv

Lock these dates into your diary now

Further details as to venue etc will be available in the next issue of OIKOS and on our website soon.

Neil Cole in Melbourne

Founding Director of Church Multiplication Resources

<http://www.cmaresources.org>

For further information, contact OIKOS

Wednesday the 5th of April -Friday the 7th April. 10am- 5pm.

WHERE: Urban Life 143 Maroondah Hwy Ringwood.

COST: \$75 Concession. \$95 Workers.

To register please email vic@forge.org.au by April 1st.

Also -

Postcard from the edge with Neil Cole. Wednesday 5th. 7:30pm. \$15 workers \$10 Concession.

at the Retro Cafe 413 Brunswick Street Fitzroy. Meals and drinks for sale.

Australian Cell Church Network

2006 Australian Summit - Date Claimer

General Summit: 9.00am Wednesday 16th

to 2.00pm Friday 18th August

Youth/Young Adults Summit: 7.00 pm Friday 18th

to 2.00 pm Sunday 20th August

Guest Speaker: Gary Skinner, Leader of Kampala Pentecostal Church, Founder of Watoto Child Care Ministries www.watoto.com Gary will bring a focus to the summit of mobilising the church to minister and reach the local community

Location: Alexandra Park Conference Centre, Alexandra Headlands, Sunshine Coast, Queensland www.uccc.com.au

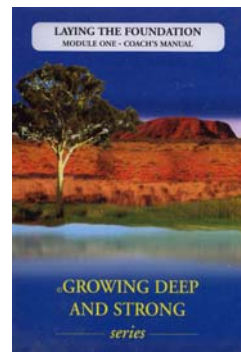
On-line registration and download registration forms available shortly
Australian Cell Church Network

Website: www.accn.org.au

email: admin.ccc@citywide.org.au

***'Growing Deep and
Strong' Series***

*David Searle and
Carl Fechner*



**This series is excellent for
Home Churches for**

discipling new Christians

Further information, including sample pages of the discipleship course materials, can be viewed and purchased from the web site.

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buried in our paradigmatic structures. The history of these structures needs to be learned in order to understand the true causes of our failed systems. The Constantinian debate is a central issue at the root of our paradigms. We need to understand this historical phenomenon, the changes wrought and the long-term flow-on effects resulting from this period. There are several issues at stake here.

One is our understanding of our own identity, with God, and with each other. The other is the times in which we live. In corporatising the local church, and calling it “culturally relevant”, we have set up for ourselves a kingdom similar to the very systems we are called to stand apart from. In doing so, we are not following Jesus’ example in living a life counter to the world’s structures.

To understand the history of the Constantinian era with its institutions and political alliances gives us a base from which to understand the importance of the current movement of the emerging church/ house church.

As in the times of Constantine, we have another epoch emerging in which the institutional church is seeking political position, prominence and influence. We can see the power brokers of these institutions seeking to use secular systems to achieve power and influence. I see in this something of the signs of the times. As watchmen, have we become complacent? We need to recognise the difference between *engaging with* the powers and

principalities, and becoming *engaged to* them.

If we look back into relatively recent history, to the beginning of the Russian Revolution, we find the church leadership of that country discussing the colour of their robes as a priority issue immediately preceding the imposing of 70 years of communist rule. They did not see it coming. One is compelled to ask, “Where was the prophetic voice?” These,

...we have set up for ourselves a kingdom similar to the very systems we are called to stand apart from

and similar events, should serve as a warning to us so that we do not repeat the same mistakes.

However we are, yet again, in similar times. Our institutions are seeking political alliances. Both the politician and the minister are seeking to gain advantage from the other’s networks. We are seeing empire building in so many spheres of church, as opposed to Kingdom building. There is no precedent for this activity in the example of Jesus. In fact, quite the opposite. Jesus made it clear, “My kingdom is not of this world...” Yet we continue to build our towers. The logical conclusion of this is our own destruction. History repeated.

I’d like to invite some who are more skilled in the exposition of history to elaborate on the Constantinian era, and bring us into a clearer understanding of the implications of this as it effects us

in our times. We have been entangled in structures so long, there is pressing need to learn Kingdom principles from the ground up. Hopefully this can serve as a primer for further discussion, further understanding. There is much to be learned in understanding our history.

The Gospel we embrace must be resilient, it must be tough. Tough enough to carry us forward into the things that lie before us, much of which we don’t understand or comprehend yet. The days ahead are going to require courage, determination, and a raw, untamed, gutsy never-give-in tenacity. We are not building comfort zones this time. The building that is achieved as we follow Jesus will place us where our sufferings will be like His.

One of the secrets, I believe, to the success of this emerging is its continued, intentional obscurity, its shunning of publicity, of big name ministries and empire building, and its embracing of one-another.

To speak of “grass-roots” in terms of naming a movement, we think of the picture grass-roots brings. There is nothing on display about grass roots. They stay hidden. They can only function when they are embedded in the soil from which they draw their nutrients. It is the product of their function that is evident, not the roots themselves. So, if we are truly “grass-roots”, we will be obscure. If we can grasp this concept, we are well on the way to understanding how we are to conduct ourselves as this emergence progresses.

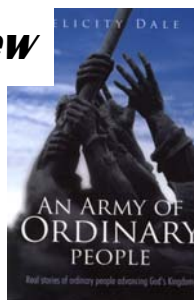
This could well be the beginning of the final ingathering, though I am careful to make no claims to end-times prophecy or any such predictions. What I do see seems very much to take the shape of what is spoken of in scripture where it says of God, "I will build my church, and the gates of hell will not prevail..." Notice the emphasis, *God* will build *His* church. It will not be man-made; it will not conform to what we would call "culturally relevant" or "seeker sensitive" or any one of many such clichés.

This new emergence is raw, it is rough around the edges, it is fluid and adaptable. It is spontaneous, it is exiting, and it has the ability to gather and embrace the differences and the unusual in their differences right where they are. This move does not need a man-made management system. In fact, to apply man made systems will destroy the progress already made. More than this, it all seems to be happening despite our best efforts!

What was the song? "...the future's so bright, I've gotta wear shades!" This thing God is doing is vibrant, full of wonder, often scary and bone-jarringly challenging – welcome to the ragged edge! Interestingly, over the last few years, there are more and more people who are thinking similarly. More so, they are becoming known to one-another. This whole emergence is really gaining momentum. To say it's taking shape doesn't really describe it, because each time it pops up somewhere, it has a different "shape". In all, could we do better than to expect the unexpected?

Book Review

"An Army of Ordinary People"
Felicity Dale
Real stories of ordinary people advancing God's Kingdom



Karis Publishing, Inc. ISBN/
SKU: 0971804060

Page Count: 280

This is a book I would love to see in every home church for two reasons. Not only does it include lots of information about home church in a very readable form for enquirers, but it also has lots of 'meat' for meetings which will challenge, inspire and bless, and help us to step up in availability for God's purposes.

The layout of the book is very inviting. Lots of stories of ordinary people and the situations that God used in their lives, interspersed with 'Key Thoughts' on a wide range of subjects to do with what God is doing in our day in His church.

I was encouraged, too, with the stories of the way God uses the sort of person I am, and the sort of people I know in the home churches. As Felicity says in her book 'God uses ordinary people to do the extraordinary'.

Greatest advantage is to be gained from reading the book right through first. It will continue to be a marvellous resource to dip into for personal benefit, and also as a great tool in the home church.

Story telling is a vital part of home church. As people learn and grow in the things of God, biblical and spiritual understand-

ing is developed by hearing the ground level stories of the ways of God in the lives of His people. Of one another.

Felicity tells the stories from her heart about the people and happenings with which she has had personal knowledge or involvement. I heard some of the stories she tells in the book from her own lips last year when I was with Tony and Felicity in their home. Their own stories are included in the book including an account of Tony's time spent in Mozambique with Rolland and Heidi Baker after the devastating floods in the 90s. (See last OIKOS for review of the Baker's book) They also tell of the long period in their life when they couldn't see anything happening and then saw an amazing turn of events.

Felicity includes stories that may challenge our preconceptions of the norms of evangelism (whatever they are!) when one discovers the amazing initiatives of the Holy Spirit to reach lives enmeshed in the new age or in self-destructive lifestyles. The stories are stark, reflecting what is 'out there' in the real world.

The more we see God tipping us out of our comfort zones in our lives and church life, the more we are going to need to see what to expect and what it takes to fulfil the Great Commission. This book is up to the minute in providing us with some understanding of what it means to be truly missional Ed.

This book is available through OIKOS for \$25 incl p&p. Buy it from our web site under 'resources' and then go to 'House2House', or contact direct. OIKOS details on P.3.

(Continued from page 7)

catch the proverbial wave, we should think about a couple of details.

A chief consideration should be: What has really changed through this new approach to church in America? Another point of concern should be: Will this change—whatever this *change* may be—be effective towards making the church more of what God wants or just a change of scenery?

In much of the house church printed materials there is pandemic reference given to the change in church in the aftermath of Constantine the Great, 285-337AD.

For a quick overview, Constantine embraced the church, revolutionizing it. He brought it out of the shadows and periphery of the Roman world, institutionalising it into buildings, structures, and organisations directly connecting it to the society and the state. In addition, he changed “conversion” to where edict, or military annexation, became the active means of “spreading the gospel.” Constantine’s armies conquered under the symbol of the Cross, bringing this bastardised form of “Christianity” into regions where it had not been introduced, on Roman social, political and cultural levels. It is said Constantine reinvented the way people have thought about church ever since his time.

Many house church theorists and leaders see Constantine, perhaps, as the most corrupting individual in church history. But even with this view, there doesn’t seem to

be a connection between the observations that the changes under Constantine were bad and a move to track them down in our own day to rid ourselves of these errors. If Constantine were really as bad as he is made out to be, you’d think eradicating the problems he instituted would be the top order of the day.

Many authors stop at identifying the point where the church went off into tremendous error. They correlate this point to various surface details, such as: the introduction of buildings, hierarchical structures, ritual practices, and the inventions of traditions. These introductions signal epic change. However, few writers deal with the real problems of the Constantinian church; like the confusion over the believers’ true identity, assimilation of the church into secular society, and how this changed the way we relate to the non-believing world.

All is to say, there continues to be several wide chasms separating what we see of the church in the early decades after Christ, or in the church in oppressive states, from our own attempt to recapture these “hallowed” experiences in this modern movement. We’d like to think we are emulating the former in our efforts, but we haven’t really stepped into their shoes yet. For all the talk of cutting off Constantine, we have not made it as far away from him as we think.

(The rest of his main points follow in brief. This article in full will appear in the ‘articles’ section on our web site. It is too long to publish here.).....

1. Church people in America think of themselves in a pluralism: spiritual and physical. First, they think of themselves as Christians, the spiritual aspect. At the same time they equally identify themselves as Americans, the physical parallel. one loyalty is being served at the expense of the other (*cf.* Matt 6:24).

2. Another major expanse that separates the house church in the West from being directly comparable to the early church *or* the modern oppressed church is the fact that we have not divested the wares of the institutional church. These are simply being reverse-engineered into much of the house church.

3. A third abyss preventing us from being able to compare the house church movement in America to the early church or the church in closed countries, is that we have not considered our part in suffering and persecution. Our Americanised value of comfort and ease has led us down the wide path of least resistance.

Frankly, we need a modern-day Pentecost, where we once again start to receive power and direction from God. This is not to be confused with a holy-roller event. This is an event that will revive what God wants to do through the church, once man has sat down, clasped his hand over his mouth, and waited upon the Holy Spirit. This will be an event where God removes the dead works of religion, misconception, misunderstandings and foolishness so closely associated with *church* even the *house church*.

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OIKOS would be very interested to hear of recent events in your Home Church or similar group. Send us any news or ideas of interest to other Home Churches. Drawings and children's contributions are most welcome.

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