

# **MICROS**

**GOD'S NEW CHURCH FOR  
NEW ZEALAND**

**BY TONY COLLIS**

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3 Coniston Street, Wainuiomata, Lower Hutt, New Zealand

(04) 970 3835, [tonycollis@paradise.net.nz](mailto:tonycollis@paradise.net.nz)

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## **Part 1 A New Wineskin**

Jesus said “I will build my church” and for two thousand years He has been. Over those two millennia the Church has evolved, changed, altered and emerged to the point where we are presently seeing the greatest in-gathering of people to Jesus Christ ever. In parts of Asia, Central and South America and Africa, the Church has been growing exponentially. Wherever the Church has adjusted its style and modus operandi, whenever she has been prepared for ‘new wine skins’ for the ‘new wine’, she has grown and expanded to accommodate those who have found Christ and have chosen the Christ way.

As you travel the globe you will find that churches look, sound and even smell different. For a few decades now we have seen in the West the birth of the mega-church. Churches of thousands have been making huge waves in their cities,

nations and in the world. The local congregational church has continued to have a presence but in many areas these fellowships have struggled to grow and many have in fact diminished or closed. Some denominations are shrinking by their thousands every year because of the demise of the community church. In New Zealand, almost all of the denominations have been shrinking apart from a few which have been just keeping their heads above water. If the truth was known, some of that growth would be due to the planting of ethnic fellowships, their figures masking the lowering numbers among the Europeans. Jesus has still been building His church though, for hidden among the communities of our nation has emerged another expression of the Church called the 'Micro-church'. This type of church has been marked by a commitment to small groups of people to gather in homes and other venues to explore authentic Christian community, lifestyle, worship and mission. Unseen by the majority of churches, this move of God has been building in momentum and is about to explode in our nation as it already has done in other countries around the world.

This document is to introduce you to 'Followers Network' part of the micro-church movement in New Zealand.

### **Turning Forty**

Early September 2001 I was enjoying a day off in my front lawn cleaning up the yard. Suddenly I found myself in the middle of a discussion with the Lord during which time He reminded me that I would be turning forty in December. I had come to Christ as an eleven year old and at the age of eighteen had started into full time Christian ministry. Apart from eighteen months in sales and four years in pastoral ministry, I had served churches around New Zealand as an evangelist. Most people would have considered me a very committed and fruitful Christian, but I had become increasingly challenged with the consequences of Christ's 'Great Commission' to "Go into all the world and make disciples, baptising them in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit and teaching them to do all I have commanded you". As I reflected on the coming milestone of my fortieth birthday, I realised that I did not want to live another twenty-nine years as a Christian and serve another nineteen as an evangelist, in quite the same way. I knew the Lord was asking me to rededicate myself and my ministry to Him and the cause of the Great Commission.

On the third of December, 2001, as I was flying from Wellington to Auckland to attend a conference on evangelism, I quietly surrendered myself to the Lord. Very quickly from that time onward, the Lord began to open my eyes about the power of small groups to be fruitful and faithful in the harvest. As an evangelist I had written a manual on small group evangelism ten years earlier, which had been well utilised by churches and denominations around New Zealand. I had seen the power of the small group many times, both personally, and in the churches I had worked with. I had studied and worked with church 'cell groups' and was excited about their potential and about their impact in other parts of the world.

More and more though, it became obvious that the Lord was challenging me to unlock the power of the small group for discipleship and quality Christian fellowship leading to fruitful relational evangelism. Concepts and ideas concerning house churches and micro-churches became prominent in my thinking. As I studied how the early church functioned, I began to see how micro-churches could be networked and supported to be powerful change agents in their communities. I felt nervous as I had not heard such concepts before, even though I saw them in the Bible, and I began to feel more than a little uncomfortable about what I should be doing with them. Just when I began to question myself, God began to connect me with people who would fuel this vision. Articles, web sites, books and strategic individuals came across my pathway and to my delight I realised that the Lord had already been journeying with large numbers of people in the same way. I became energised as I met people who had effectively launched micro-churches and networks for micro-churches. It became obvious to me that I was about to step into something truly enormous.

### **First Steps**

At the beginning of 2002 the Lord encouraged me with the words to Mary, "What is conceived in you is of the Holy Spirit." I knew that I was pregnant with something from God and that I needed to be proactive in preparing for the delivery. Over a number of months I resigned and left the para-church ministry I had served fifteen years in. I began to pray, listen and research. I shared my convictions with others who in turn either encouraged me or debated with me. I began to paint a picture in my mind about what such a movement of micro-churches might look like and at times shared that picture with non-Christians I met, always receiving a very enthusiastic response. I will paint the picture with you in the next section of this document.

I continued to serve other fellowships as an evangelist while I waited for God's timing to start with our first micro-church. Then one Sunday morning in the middle of September, at my home church, the Lord clearly directed me from the message, that I was to begin. Some people approached me sharing their interest in being part of what we were doing, and the Lord brought a number of people to us who were not going to any church. Our journey began with twenty five people in two groups. After our first evening together, one of our members had a dream that night which she felt was from the Lord. She shared the dream with us the following Tuesday and this is what it was.

We were in a room trying to lay carpet, but the carpet did not fit. As she was working out what to do, the Lord supernaturally adjusted the carpet so that it fitted perfectly. Together we attempted other things, during which time the Lord was meeting us and making the difference between success and failure. This dream was a great encouragement to us all as we realised that all we need to do is take the first steps in following the Lord into His dreams and plans for the

micro-church movement during which time, He would meet us part way and build His Church. He waits for us to begin and work, and then He rewards such faith with supernatural encouragement and blessing.

### **Painting the Picture**

Let me pause now and share with you our values and vision. Christian motivationalist, Zig Ziglar says, “The main thing is to keep the main thing the main thing”. What are the main things this church will keep as the main things?

- **Loving God.** Sometimes we are so busy doing things for God and living life, we have no time to love God. The greatest of all of the commandments is “to love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind” Matthew 22:37-38. Imagine a community of followers of Jesus who are truly in love with Him. Loving Him through real and connected communion personally and as a church family. Heart-felt prayer and worship must flow freely from the heart of the follower.
- **Small groups.** The heart of church life is community and because this happens best in small groups, they will be the main expression of church life. For the first three hundred years of the church, believers met in homes and experienced close and supportive relationships. During those years the church grew in an explosive fashion, which tailed off when church life became focused around church buildings. The epistles are loaded with “one another” exhortations for the Church to live out. These ‘one anothers’ cannot be lived out in any other way apart from small groups. In churches that have sixty people or more, it is too hard to love one another, serve one another, pray for one another, carry one anothers burdens, share with one another, confess your sins to one another and encourage one another. Small groups are the only way these mandates can be realised.
- **Healthy relationships.** We live in a fractured society. Families and relationships are important to God. Some committed Christians are so busy with work and church activities, they find themselves being dislocated from family members with so many meetings to attend and jobs to be completed. Many people are lonely, even though they are surrounded by others. These micro-churches will be big on family times and building quality friendships. Meetings, no matter how small or how big, cannot replace meaningful one on one relationships. Followers are encouraged to include those they connect with into their lives. The best in Christian fellowship and relationship building takes place in the context of intimate friendship.
- **Personal development.** Every follower of Jesus has value, not only as a child of God but also as an important community member. God has given each individual gifts and abilities which when developed and utilised, can be of great benefit to others. God has a place for each follower to serve and shine. As a church we will encourage all family members to become the best they can be according to their gifts, calling and abilities. We will seek to provide training and resources to assist everyone in their personal development.
- **Personal fruitfulness.** God has a dream that we be the best we can be. He wants us to be growing in our ability to live according to His plan, presented in the Bible. He wants us to journey with others to a point where they not only become followers of Jesus Christ, but they in turn bring others to Jesus. God always designed that the best in personal fruitfulness takes place in the context of team. We achieve more individually, in a team context.
- **Loving others.** God loves the world and wants those who are following Him to be ‘others’ focused. As much as God loves the local church, He loves lost people as well. From the beginning of the Church, God desired that the world would be saved and has left it to those who are following Him to do the job. It is part of the D.N.A of the true Church to be ‘others’ focused. As much as we love God and each other, this church will seek to harness, talents, abilities, resources, time and money to love, serve, help and reach others for Jesus Christ. We will act locally and think globally, seeking to impact our community, city, nation and world with the love, power, message and reality of Jesus Christ.

Well, what do you think? Sure, many churches would say that this is what they stand for as well. The challenge is to ensure that these values are more than just a wish list, but that in fact they are lived out and fleshed out. Sadly many churches and many Christians are so distracted by other things, they find it hard to embrace these above principles as part of their lifestyle. After being a Christian for twenty-nine years, I have come to the point where I realise that I need to put aside other distractions and activities in order to live these concepts. I want, I need authentic Christianity.

### **Networking the Kingdom**

From the birth of the Church, God provided servant gifts to help start, grow and build her. In Ephesians chapter four we read that these were Apostles, Prophets, Evangelists, Pastors and Teachers. These individuals were called to “equip the saints for the work of ministry.” Their job was to empower, encourage and equip every Christian to fulfil God’s dream for them individually and collectively. They were to ensure that the Church was to be mature and whole. These individuals were also called to support and strengthen God’s called leaders as they sought to serve the followers under their care.

The ministry of the 'Big Five' is being restored to the Church, and certainly will be realised and active in the Followers Network. Without doubt, the most crucial gifting to see outworked in the micro-church planting network, is that of the Apostle. Internationally respected church leader, Bill Hybals correctly encourages fellow church leaders to ensure that pastors pastor, teachers teach, evangelists evangelise and I would add, let Apostles plant and build. Ephesians 4:11,12 clearly tells us that unless we are exposed to all of the five fold gifts (Apostle, Prophet, Evangelist, Pastor, Teacher), then we will not come into full maturity. Who are we to argue with God about the people He had called and gifted to bring completeness to His Church? Where as, all Christians have spiritual gifts, only five type of people are 'gifts' themselves. Gifts from God to His body. Who are we to ignore God's gifts and His perfectly designed strategy for servant leadership?

As mentioned earlier, the Church of God is larger than one denomination, style flavour and concept. The Church of God is wider than mega-churches, local congregational churches of micro-churches. The Church of God encompasses all who claim Jesus Christ as fully God, as their forgiver, deliverer, and king, who died and rose again.. Therefore we accept all of our brothers, sisters and servant leaders, no matter their denomination or church style. We are one through Christ.

At the same time, we seek to be a blessing to our brothers and sisters outside of the Network, anyway we can. Christ prayed that we would be one, that we would know unity.

As a network, we are also available to assist other fellowships and denominations if we can. I see a time when the Apostles, Prophets, Evangelists, Pastors and Teachers God gives us, can be a blessing to other congregations and fellowships.

### **Why Followers Network?**

We have adopted this name for the following reasons.

- Jesus called some of His disciples and said "Follow me and I will make you fishers of men." We realise that God's greatest plan for people is to follow Him, and in so doing, help others to become followers as well. The Great Commission is to be 'the main thing'. We are also reminded that He is the great attraction and we are to follow Him. Follow His love for the Father and His love for others.
- Jesus selected His disciples. Among other things the word disciple means 'follower'. He selects us and calls us His followers.
- The word 'followers' communicates that we are all on the same level ground. Though God may call some into servant leadership, we are called to be servants. Though some may be called to love through leadership, we are all called to love others. All good leaders should be great followers.
- 'Followers', communicates a real relationship with God where He is directing and leading. Where there is communication and guidance. This word communicates a life that is Christ-like in motivation and direction, not necessarily perfect, but certainly purpose driven.
- The word 'Network' communicates the fact that every micro-church is only a part of the whole and because of that, needs to be connected with others at time. We need each other, no matter the style or denomination.
- This word also communicates the power of micro-churches working together. When we network gifts, resources and personnel, we can often accomplish more than if we worked alone.

God has a dream for this world, and micro-churches is part of that dream. Have you been dreaming God's dream too. If you have, I welcome you to walk into it by being a follower too. Join the Followers Network.

## **Part 2 Back to Basics**

The micro-church movement is not new and in-fact originates in Acts chapter two. In recent years it has been growing in momentum and influence in China, central Asia, Latin America, India, Cambodia and North America. These micro-churches have been known as house-churches, street churches and underground churches. They have become part of the main expression of church life for millions of people. In the West, many of these fellowships are independent and do not fellowship with other similar groups.

This has been the case here in New Zealand, where house-churches have been among our communities, but have generally kept to themselves, whilst focusing more on themselves rather than the non-Christian others. Often these groups have been made up of people who have found themselves disenfranchised from the traditional church for all sorts of reasons. I have met some people who have come to Christ during their own personal journey and have struggled to find a connection with the local church. They have somehow made contact with members of a house-church and have joined. Sometimes these house-churches have been birthed and lived for a season, closing when finally the numbers have made the group no longer viable. This has resulted in some people gravitating back to the local church or even disappearing into the growing mass of dislocated disciples who try to live the Christian life outside of community, something that is both unbiblical and unhealthy.

Whether successful or struggling, these small communities have begun the journey because of their desire to experience Christian community and biblical faith and witness. Some of these people have been bold explorers searching for avenues to flesh out what they read in their Bible. God has rewarded their faith and courage with the emerging of a new generation micro-church, where these fellowships have become outward looking, mission focused, interdependent and networked with other micro-churches and with the wider body of Christ.

Now micro-churches and their networks have become a stream for the healthy, mission hungry, passionately in love with Jesus world changers. For many who have gone back to the basics of Christian lifestyle and fellowship, they have been rewarded with the new wine which God is pouring out into this new wineskin. Pastor Larry Kreider from Pennsylvania, USA, has launched a network of micro-churches called Dove Fellowships. This movement has been growing significantly through both transfer addition and conversion multiplication both in America and in many nations around the world. In New Zealand, a fledgling youth focused network has begun called 'The Revolution'. Starting early this year it has built to eight groups and is poised to spread through the nation and beyond. Already they have a group in Germany! These believers have seen what can be accomplished if they guard themselves from being distracted by programmes and events and instead choose to be committed to the big three, loving God, each other, and the lost.

#### **Embracing the difference**

For those who are still a little unsure about what makes micro-churches so different, Wolfgang Simson writes the following in his book 'Houses that change the World' about the comparisons between the congregational model and micro-church.

	<b>Congregational Church</b>	<b>New Testament Church</b>
<b>place</b>	meets in sanctuaries	moves from house to house
<b>main functionaries</b>	Pastors, Teachers, Evangelists	Apostles, Prophets, Elders
<b>finances</b>	tithes and offerings	sharing all they have
<b>lifestyle</b>	individual	community
<b>evangelism</b>	outreach, programs, specialists	natural discipling, new groups
<b>battle cry</b>	get people into the church	get the church into new homes
<b>size</b>	big, impersonal groups	small, intimate groups
<b>teaching style</b>	static, sermon-centred	kinetic, discussion-style
<b>pastors main job</b>	lead the church program, preach, visit	equip others to do the work
<b>centre</b>	worship service in a building	the ordinary house
<b>key word</b>	become a member	Go and make disciples!
<b>ministry</b>	performance oriented	equipping oriented
<b>mission</b>	send specialised missionaries	church sends itself to multiply

There are distinctive differences between the micro-church and the cell church. They are very similar in many ways, for example, both groups can be great environments for pastoral care, relational evangelism and mentoring. But they are strategically different in other areas. Consider the following comparisons...

#### **Cell Church**

#### **Micro-Church**

The cell is part of a larger church  
 The cell is part of the church's programme  
 The meetings can often be very structured  
 The celebration in a building can often be the main thing  
 The cell gathering is secondary  
 The cell leadership structure is pyramid in shape  
 Cells often have a set programme  
 Cells are often dependant  
 Cells are multiplication focused  
 Cells can be focused on 'doing'  
 Cells give all of their tithe to the head office

The micro-church can exist alone  
 The small group is the church  
 The meetings are very flexible  
 The house church is the main thing  
 The celebration time is secondary  
 Micros are elder and 'Big Five' led.  
 House churches are the programme  
 Micros are interdependent  
 Micros are incarnational focused  
 Micros are often 'doing' and 'being'  
 Micros self manage their funds

### Reading between the lines

Though we have been given some glimpses concerning how the early church met together, we also are missing a clear order of service. God instead has given us the Holy Spirit to work with us in the middle of our culture and time in world history to explore contemporary and creative ways to be the Church.

Larry Kreider rightly informs us that more than ever before, the lost in our culture are looking for four things, all of which are available in the new generation micro-church. They are relationships, authentic Christianity, freedom to be creative and inter-generational connection. People want spiritual fathers and mothers.

The 'one anothers' and directives in the epistles, the principles in the gospels and the insights in the book of Acts, give us freedom to be fleshed out in multiple ways. A micro-church of Samoans probably will look different at points to a group of Korean youth, European retirees, or multi-generational family units. A micro-church of new converts will most definitely look and feel different to a group made up of people who have been brought up in traditional congregational church environments. As long as God's directives, principles and insights for church life are embraced, then the how, when and what questions of gathering are as flexible as imagination and the ministry of the Holy Spirit.

Having said that, here are some of the principles and biblical practices these micro-churches will manifest.

- **Eating.** Families eat together, and so does the family of God. For the early church, the dinner time became the love feast during which time they celebrated communion. While they ate together, they shared victories, challenges and insights. As they consumed they communed. Still today we build relationships over cappuccino at cafés or pizzas in the park. Strangers become friends after only a few minutes eating together, because what can go wrong over some food? In our first ever meeting, the hostess had a visitor who stayed on for a short time to get a handle on who we were and what we were doing. She was invited to stay and enjoy the meal, which she did. By the end of the evening she became a new member of the group. Food had made a friend. Before the night was out she said, "Invite someone to church and they probably will say no. Invite them to a pot luck dinner at your place and they probably will say yes." She was exactly correct.
- **Meeting.** Obviously there needs to be a time when the group puts aside the tucker and begins to minister and share with each other. At this stage let's have a quick look at some of the 'one anothers' in the epistles to get glimpses as to what we do do together.
  1. "...love one another with brotherly affection;..." Romans 12:9
  2. "...outdo one another in showing honour." Romans 12:10
  3. "Welcome one another..." Romans 15:7
  4. "Bear one another's burdens,..." Galatians 6:2
  5. "...forbearing one another in love, eager to maintain the unity..." Ephesians 4:2,3
  6. "...and be kind to one another...forgiving one another... Ephesians 4:32"
  7. "... addressing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody to the Lord with all you heart,..." Ephesians 5:19
  8. "Be subject to one another,..." Ephesians 5:21
  9. "Do not lie to one another..." Colossians 3:9
  10. "...forgiving each other, as the Lord has forgiven you..." Colossians 3:13
  11. "Let us consider how we can stir up one another to love and good works, not neglecting to meet together..." Hebrews 10:24
  12. "...confess your sins to one another, and pray for one another," James 5:16
  13. "Above all hold unfailing your love for one another..." 1 Peter 4:8
  14. "Practice hospitality, ungrudgingly to one another..." 1 Peter 4:9
  15. "As each has a gift, employ it for one another..." 1 Peter 4:10

16. "...love one another..." 1 John 4:7

Prayer, singing together, sharing from the scriptures, ministering to each other through the use of the spiritual gifts and serving each other are parts of a healthy group. To deepen relationships, smaller groups of three or so can meet together as part of the evening. These three people can share their struggles, sins and needs with each other. This transparency means that they can pray and minister to each other with a greater sense of clarity and accountability. These small groups (cells), could meet outside of the larger group time, but they need to be available for every person. The Lord's Supper (Communion) is an important sacrament of the Church and can easily be part of the meal time or worship time.

- **Greeting.** New people will be part of a healthy group, and these new people need to be introduced and eased into the community. Eating together helps to build bridges but there are other things you can do to link people in. When the Quakers invite a new person into the community, everyone in the group answers questions like... Where did you live in the first five years of your life? How was your house heated during that time? Share one of the most embarrassing things that has happened to you. Share one of the most significant things that has happened to you? When did God become more than a word to you? Such questions answered by each person invite laughter, more questions and points of connection. I have utilised these questions in many small group gatherings where we have either all met as strangers, or a few new people have visited the group. I have seen people become relaxed and within in short time, become part of the group. Ice breakers are fun activities and games people can enjoy together and there are many ice breaker resources available through Christian book shops or Cell Church libraries. Visitors should be contacted within twenty four hours of their visit as a follow up and another point of connection.
- **Seeking.** Jesus said that "The Son of Man has come to seek and save the lost." Part of the time together should be focused on those who do not know Jesus Christ. Three things can be done in this area. 1) Sharing and praying about people we are seeking to love to Christ. 2) Planning together ways the team can reach out to others utilising the combined efforts, gifts, resources and time. 3) Sharing with each other about what we will be doing individually to love others to Christ. There should always be room for more in a healthy micro-church. As a visual reminder, a good idea would be to always have an empty chair to prove that there is always room for more.
- **Giving.** Right from the birth of the early church, Christians were known for their generosity. They gave to the needs within their group, they gave to those who served them through servant leadership (the Apostles and others), and they gave to those involved in missionary work as well as brothers and sisters from other regions. In the congregational model people are encouraged to tithe (give ten percent of their wages), to their church. These funds generally are mainly utilised for covering the overheads of having a facility and staff. Generally 85% of the income of a typical congregation is used on themselves with 15% being invested into mission. These figures are reversed in the micro-church so that 15% is utilised by the group for themselves and **85%** is invested into mission work. Micro-church members are encouraged to bring their tithe to the group when they meet. Like many other churches, we believe that the Bible teaches that we should give at least the tithe and above it if we can, in fact the Bible clearly teaches us to give sacrificially. Once counted, they decide where the funds go and how they invest the money. Every Followers group has guidelines to help them be good stewards of their resources, some of which are... 1) Help meet the needs within the group. 2) Give to those who are Network itinerant ministries, who minister to the church and other micros. 3) Give to help bless and love those that they are seeking to reach out to. 4) Give to ministries and organisations who are involved in the Great Commission, 5) Give 10% of the tithe to the main fund of Follower Network. This money will be used to cover administration costs involved in receipting gifts for tax purposes. The money will also be used to cover some of the costs involved when the micro-churches gather together regularly for celebration and equipping. More about this later.

#### **A model**

The following is one idea about what might take place in a meeting. The following model has four parts.

- 1) Eating together. This can be a lunch, sit down dinner, barbecue, pot luck or finger food. This could take around about an hour. Communion could be part of this.
- 2) Combined meeting. During this time the elder (leader) will lead or ask others to lead through ice-breakers, prayer, worship, discussion/learning, ministry and giving. This can take one hour.
- 3) Break into cells for sharing and praying with each other. This can take another hour or so.
- 4) The meeting after the meeting. Though some with children may have to go home, others may want to either stay for coffee, or go somewhere else to connect further.

Circumstances and the leading of the Spirit will mean that flexibility in each meeting will be required. Not everything needs to be done at every meeting. The group might end up praying all night, or the discussion may become the main



thing. What does matter is that the group gathers regularly (not necessarily on Sunday), and maintains a healthy focus on the main thing of evangelism.

## Part 3 Network Distinctives

As mentioned beforehand, house churches are not a new phenomenon, but in fact originate in the book of Acts and is presently normal church experience in different parts of the world. What is different though is the growth of this micro-church in the West and the networking of these groups together. What does it mean to be part of the Followers Network here in New Zealand?

The Followers Network is not a large building where people gather every week for worship and services, but is in fact a group of micro-churches and other churches who are adopting micro principles, who are interconnected through vision (The Great Commission); style (micro-churches meeting in homes at schools, in restaurants and the like); the servant ministry of the 'Big Five' (Apostles, Prophets, Evangelists, Pastors and Teachers); leadership through locally recognised elders, agreement to the statement of faith, combined regional celebrations and training and financial investment into the Network.

### Network Vision

All healthy things grow. A sign of life is growth and a sure evidence that a micro-church is what it should be is numerical growth. From the very beginning God has shown interest in numbers for as we read the book of Acts, the church was at 120 in chapter one, growing by three thousand in chapter two and another five thousand later on. God is not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance. Therefore, all Followers micro-churches will be encouraged to not only plant and build new churches, but to plant and build new 'church-planting' churches. We believe that the Lord wants to see His Church reaching into every people group, every ethnic group, culture and sub-culture in our communities, cities, country and throughout the world. The ministry of the 'Big Five' will help keep the fellowships on target and equipped. They will ensure that the main thing will remain the main thing, protecting the fellowships from becoming insular and introverted. These new micro's will start when... 1) existing micros become too big

- 2) new leadership emerges who have a desire to plant
- 3) Apostles plant in a new area
- 4) existing churches connect with the network because of their desire to transition into micro concepts and practices.

All church planters will be sent out, commissioned, prayed for and supported by the Network Leadership Team and Big Five ministries. Some may even receive financial assistance, though as a general rule they will be expected to plant and build whilst continuing with their normal place of employment. We have a vision to see Followers churches throughout Wellington, around New Zealand and in other nations around the world. Internationally respected author, researcher and leader, C. Peter Wagner, writes that the fastest way to grow a church is plant a church. We believe in church planting. Church planting is the most fruitful way to be strategically fulfilling The Great Commission... making disciples and followers.

### Network Style.

All groups and cultures are different and appropriate wineskins should be made for each. What connects the churches in the Network is the focus on making small 'BIG'. Micro-churches embrace the power of the small group as the big idea when it comes to Christian community, life and witness. The Network style emphasises the small through weekly gatherings, but also enjoys the big through regional combined celebrations. The Network style recognises leadership but lives out the important truth that we are all kings and priests to serve our God. We live out the biblical truth often called 'the priesthood of all believers'. That means that we have all been equally called to serve God and each other. The Network style says that there is always room for more and combined resources, time, talents and gifting need to be harnessed to harvest. Where and how these groups function are wide open to the direction of the Spirit and the type of people who it exists for.

### The Network 'Big Five'

We have written about the five-fold ministry already. I would like to explain a bit more about who these people are and what they do.

- **Apostle.** The Bible clearly reveals that there are different types of apostles. There were the twelve that Jesus selected. This group cannot be added to. Then there were others called apostles examples of whom were Paul and Barnabas. Apostles create, launch, establish and provide for new initiatives. They are spiritual fathers who envision, resource and guide new works, new churches and new ministries. These apostles are people of vision and with the capacity to gather and train others who connect with the vision. Over the years apostles have been ministering in churches, denominations and ministries around the world. Often functioning as missionaries or high level leaders these people have ministered as apostles without being named as such, maybe even shrinking from acknowledging the title. We acknowledge those that God has called and used for such roles, but we will be careful not to give a person such a title without ample evidence and obvious gifting and calling. Because the Church has been so slow in recognising apostles in the past, it is difficult to break that mold and begin to recognise and acknowledge such people. Apostles have a calling to draw and channel the other 'Big Five' gifts for body development and health. Their role is vital for any church planting movement.
- **Prophet.** The Bible is very clear about the need of the prophet for the local church. Prophets are people who are hearers and discerners. They have the capacity to see things way before others do. Their ministry is to warn, exhort, challenge and direct. These prophets need to be listened to, discerned properly and applied. For so long Pastors have struggled to know how they handle their prophets, choosing often to quiet them down or place them into the 'extreme team' bracket, the place where the 'flakes' and 'nut cakes' belong. Sadly though, the result has been an unbalanced and imperfect church. As challenging as prophets may be, they are gifts from God for the perfecting and equipping of the saints. A prophet is recognised by the frequency and accuracy of their 'words'. Prophets are to work hand in hand with apostles for the birthing and development of ministries.
- **Evangelists.** Again called to perfect and equip, the evangelist has a constant passion to see people come to Christ. Evangelists will be itinerant around the groups helping to maintain a healthy outward focus, seeking to inspire, equip, resource and support micro-churches in their evangelism activities. Evangelists have a calling to reap where others have sown, so they will be working alongside individuals and groups to assist in bringing the ready to Christ. Evangelists will be acknowledged by their soul-winning fruit and equipping/inspiring capacity. Evangelists know that relational evangelism is the most fruitful form of claiming the harvest and so he/she empowers and motivates as many as he can in the church to be channels for the gospel.
- **Pastor.** For years the main leader in a church has been called Pastor. This has been unfortunate for many of those leaders have been more teachers, evangelists or apostles. Real pastors are not positions but gifts to the Church, who are natural shepherds who are motivated to maintain, care for and protect the flock. Real pastors can sometimes be shocking church leaders because they are so focused on the hurting, they neglect their main producers. These important people are detail people and can sometimes struggle to see the big picture. They are people oriented and not so much task oriented. They have an incredible ability to connect with and love people, being prepared to spend extreme amounts of time on individuals. Something which is way beyond the capacity of some of the other 'Big Five'.
- **Teacher.** Committed to truth and empowering others, the teacher loves studying, opening, expounding, explaining and exhorting through Bible principles. Teachers are detail people who are very careful with the Word of God. Some teachers may be a little cold with people, but are in fact committing to serving and supporting people through unlocking Biblical keys and principles. Teachers are keen to have the will of God outlived and not just understood. Because many congregational model churches have made Bible teaching and Preaching such a main focus in their Sunday worship services, some people have been concerned about the lack of Bible teaching in the micro-church. Well, those who are teachers are encouraged to not only itinerate around the groups but also minister when appropriate at the large gatherings. Today though we have access to many of the worlds most gifted and talented teachers through audio tapes, video, Christian TV , Internet, books and articles. There is no reason why micro-churches cannot access these resources let alone the Followers themselves in their private lives. There is no good reason why the average believer cannot be well fed from outstanding teaching.

There are often gift mixes among these people where you might find Apostle/Teacher, Pastor/Teacher, Prophet/Evangelist or any number of varieties. Generally though, these gifts mixes tend to have an obvious emphasis. In functioning, these people are to reproduce themselves, equipping, empowering and releasing new apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers.

Leadership of the Network is not pyramid based but relational, and based on collective wisdom and calling. Tony & Lynette Collis are part of the Network Leadership Team, being founders of the Network. They serve beside others who are called to serve through leading at that level. Apostolic gifting play's a key role at this level. This leadership team is accountable to the people they are serving and key leaders from around the nation from other churches, denominations and movements. The micro-churches are led by someone who fulfils the qualifications of an elder as listed in 1 Timothy 3. Sometimes they are called such, but other times they are simply called 'leader' of the micro-church. These elders/leaders are called to see every member in their group grow in their serving and loving roles. These elders are supported by the regular input of the 'Big Five' and the servant roles of the Network Leadership Team.

As the Network grows, we will build regional servant leaders who are not so much working in their own church but are in fact assisting other elders in their fellowships as well as planning and co-ordinating regional celebrations. Elders lead their churches, supported by the 'Big Five' and the Network Leadership Team.

### **Network Statement of Faith**

To ensure that we walk together as a network of micro-churches, we have established a Statement of Faith. All micros must embrace these non-negotiables if they want to link into the group.

#### ***We believe...***

- 1) In one God, eternal existent in three persons, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. This is the creator and sustainer of all things.
- 2) God in revealing Himself inspired the Holy Scriptures so they are entirely trustworthy and have supreme authority in all matters of doctrine, faith and conduct.
- 3) All people were made for fellowship with God but have disobeyed Him. So all people have become sinners, guilty in His sight and alienated from Him.
- 4) In our Lord Jesus Christ, God manifest in the flesh yet truly human, conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of a virgin. Even though He remained sinless, He took on Himself the sin of the world and died on the cross of Calvary as our representative and substitute. God showed His love for all people and provided the only way for them to be forgiven from the guilty penalty, set free from the power of sin and reconciled fully to Him through the atoning death, shed blood and resurrection of Jesus Christ.
- 5) In the bodily resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, His ascension into heaven and where He sits at the right hand of the Father, in His personal physical return and the judgement of all the world by Him.
- 6) The Holy Spirit brings people to individually trust Christ, repent of their sins and be baptised in water as Jesus commanded. He lives in them, and develops their new lives in Christ, thus enabling the believer to live a holy life, and to work and witness for Him in fellowship of the Church which is the Body Christ.
- 7) The Holy Spirit equips the Church to carry out God's purposes through the baptism of the believer with the Holy Spirit as evidenced by spiritual fruit and gifts.
- 8) In the resurrection of the body, the eternal blessedness of God's presence of the righteous, and the eternal punishment and separation from God of the wicked.

### **Network Celebrations**

The early church did gather together in large numbers at times. As much as the small group fosters intimacy and the truth of God's grace, closeness and fellowship; the large gathering leads us to enjoy the wonder, majesty and awesome character of God. We will draw together at times to celebrate what He is doing in the local networks (micros in a suburb), regional networks (micros in a city or district), and Lord willing, in the national network. These gathering will help us to remember that we are part of a larger network, and in fact part of the whole body of Christ. There will be times of envisioning, equipping, reporting and testimonies, worship and prayer, giving and sharing, eating and playing. Obviously though, all of these dynamics will take place on a larger scale. We will not shrink back from inviting non-Network brothers and sisters to minister to us if they have the gifting and the capacity to connect into our Network distinctive. Our desire is that children, young people and adults leave these celebrations inspired and refuelled to step out anew into the Great Commission. These celebrations may range from large meals together, camps, seminars, prayer gatherings, barbecues, visits to the beach or even the traditional conference. The Network Leaders will work beside the 'Big Five' and local elders in the designing and co-ordinating of celebrations. Celebration will be organised in advance for people to book in their diaries to make as a priority. Each micro-church is encouraged to ensure that as many as possible can attend the celebrations. As each celebration will incur costs such as facility, food, ministry gifts to worship team and preaching/teaching team and administration costs, every person attending will be required to pay a per-head fee. While most will be able to cover this cost, others will need assistance from the brothers and sisters of their group to help attend. Not one is to miss out because of financial reasons. The micro's may choose to keep aside a part of the giving every week towards conferences costs.

### **Network Training**

Workshops, seminars and training sessions are provided either live or through video. Conferences for apostles, pastors, evangelists, pastors, teachers, church planters and elders will be available as God gives us the right people to present these. At times we access courses such as Network, Contagious Christianity and Cleansing Streams for those who are interested. These must in no way replace fellowship and activity in the micro-church. We will also be running courses on how to disciple new followers. Every believer is to be a discipler.

### **Network Finances**

As mentioned before, everyone is encourage to give their tithes and offerings into the micro-church. Then those funds are used to... 1) Help meet the needs within the group (2 Corinthians 8,9). 2) Give to those who are network itinerant ministries, who minister to the church and other micro's (1 Corinthians 9:6-23). 3) Give to help bless and love those that they are seeking to reach out to (Matthew 25:31-46). 4) Give to ministries and organisations who are involved in the Great Commission (Philippians 4:10-20), 5) Give 10% of the tithes to the main fund of Followers Network. This money will be used to cover administration costs involved in receipting gifts for tax purposes. The money will also be used to cover some of the costs involved.

Because the micro-church is part of a network with charitable status, members can claim their tax refunds. Funds which are given are deposited into the account that belongs to the particular church, and then records are sent to the main office to ensure financial accountability. Moneys can be distributed based on the principals above, collective prayer and decision making. A weekly report about spending is faxed or emailed through to the head office, so that we can ensure that moneys are not being misappropriated. All accounts will be audited annually and available for public scrutiny.

At this stage we are not looking at purchasing any buildings or paying any salaries, so we are keen to have as much money as possible invested into reaching others for Jesus.

Discipleship materials and equipping tools will be produced and made available through the Network. Production costs will be covered by the main fund.

## **Part 4**

### **Receiving Existing Groups into the Network**

Research tells us that in the greater Wellington area alone, some seven thousand people are currently meeting in house churches, most of whom are not networking with others. It may be that such groups might want to become part of Followers, enjoying the benefits of the support and encouragement of the Network leadership, the 'Big Five' and the local, regional and national celebrations. There may be congregational churches who may want to connect with the network to help them transition into a group of micro-churches. We want to make room for all who are keen to journey with us to fulfil the Great Commission in our nation and beyond.

#### **An Engagement**

A twelve month engagement period will be walked through for existing groups who join the network. The time span allows both parties (the micro-church and the Network), to be sure that they are compatible and working well together. During this time they will be served like any other micro-church in the Network. They will be served through the provision of...

- Support and encouragement from the network leadership team.
- Ministry, training and energy from the 'Big Five'.
- Access to Network resources and seminars.
- Access to local, regional and national celebrations.
- Financial accountability so that all gifts given in your group can be claimed at the end of the year.

During this time, each micro-church will be expected to...

- Function within the guidelines presented in this document.
- Give 10% of their tithes to the main fund.

- Provide monthly records on income and expenditure so tax claiming requirements can be met.
- Attend celebrations.
- Give to those who come to minister to the group from the Network.
- Seek to reach lost people for Jesus Christ with a vision to plant more micro-churches.

After the twelve month engagement is over, then we can take the appropriate steps to either acknowledge the group as a full member of the Network, or we could move on in our respective journeys, praying God's best as the group moves on.

### **Questions Answered.**

*What if we are part of an existing denomination?*

As long as you can agree with our statement of faith and the micro-church principals in this document, then you can retain your denominational affiliation whilst seeing your connection with the Network as an association.

*What if we have salaried staff at the moment?*

You may decide to continue to support your staff through your micro-churches.

*What if we do not want to have our finances co-ordinated through the Network?*

As long as you continued to give into the main fund, we would be able to have you as part of the Network as an associate church, but you would not be a regular member of the 'Followers Network', as we have to give clear financial records to the tax department of all Followers groups. As an associate church you will be given the following privileges...

- Support and encouragement from the network leadership team.
- Ministry, training and energy from the 'Big Five'.
- Access to Network resources and seminars.
- Access to local, regional and national celebrations.

You will be required to...

- Function within the guidelines presented in this document.
- Give to the main fund.
- Attend celebrations.
- Give to those who come to minister to the group from the Network.
- Seek to reach lost people for Jesus Christ with a vision to plant more micro-churches

*What if we have a church building which is being under-utilised?*

There are a number of things you can do.

- Sell the venue and use the funds for mission, the Network, to bless other fellowships or non-Christians.
- Make the venue available for a congregational church to use for free or for a minimum fee.
- Allow the community to use it, having it available for yourselves when you need it.
- If it is small enough, you could turn it into a house and either rent it out so you have an income to give into mission, or provide for your staff as a manse, or allow others to use free of charge.
- You could give it to the Network who in turn could use it for celebrations, conferences or seminars.
- You could make it available to the Network for celebrations, conferences and seminars.
- You could just choose to keep it and have a percentage of the giving go towards the costs of keeping it.

- You could sub-lease it or even share it with another church, until you have grown to the point where you can use it again, but as a gathering of micro's.

*What if we wanted to continue to meet together on a Sunday morning for weekly celebration in our church?*

As long as you made the micros the main thing in the church life, then that would be fine. We would encourage you though that you do not want to get caught up in programming at the expense of active outreach and mission. We would also encourage you to explore fresh ways of celebrating as a community.

## Part 5 More Questions

*What about the children?*

There are so many ways a micro-church can minister to their children. They could...

- Have the children sit in with all of the adults the whole of the time. The whole programme could be geared for the children and when it is time to break into cells, the children can break into smaller groups lead by an older young person or an adult.
- Have the children break into their own group some time during the meeting to be taught by someone from the group. This person could be the same person every time or parents could be rostered on and take their turn to minister to the children as a group.
- The micro-church could have someone from another micro-church come and minister to the children during the meeting. This person should be seen as an important minister to the children and the church should consider blessing that person with some form of honorarium.
- The micro-church could invite someone from a congregational church or a para-church ministry to minister to the children. Again, this person should be thanked financially.

Children should not be positioned in front of the television or be given a Playstation game to keep themselves entertained. Children need to spend some of the time with the adults to learn how to pray together, share together and minister to each other. Children are not second rate believers. They too have giftings and abilities to enrich others around them.

In time we want to provide support resources and personnel to have for some of the Network micros so that the children will be ministered to and developed as called and gifted Followers.

*What are some of the potential dangers of these groups?*

- **Pride.** Some people may feel that their group has the inside run on Gods will and revelation. This is unhealthy and wrong. In our first meeting we had a visitor who suggested that we cut off all connection from other churches, because "...they had got it so wrong". I shared with that person that we could not, because the Bible tells us that there is one hope, one baptism, one faith and one Church. Christians from others churches were our brothers and sisters. The eye cannot say to the hand, I do not need you. That individual stormed out of the meeting slamming the door as he left. We paused and prayed for our angry friend after which I reinforced our need to watch out for spiritual pride. Pride can lead to an independent attitude which says we do not need anybody.
- **Fear.** For many people, this road has not been walked before. This fear can effectively stop some from walking right into the middle of Gods will for them. I must admit that I struggled with fear right at the beginning. We need early adopters who will step out because God says so. Leaders who will embrace the new path by faith, taking next steps as God graces. We are all scared of the unknown, and though micro-churches are proven in many places around the world, they are very new and untested in many parts of the West.
- **Heresy.** This is possible if house-churches are independent, dislocated from the protective and supportive roles of the 'Big Five' and Network Leadership. We have also embraced a statement of faith to protect against fundamental error.

*What about the quality of teaching?*

As mentioned before, these days we can access the best Bible teachers in the world via, the World Wide Web, video, tape, book, magazine and seminars. Most Pastors cannot compete with this level of teaching, so our argument is why compete at all. We will provide workshops, seminars and teaching during the celebration times as well as Bible teaching in the micro-church from called and recognised itinerant Bible teachers. Individuals and micro-churches can feed themselves on the very best. No group need be spiritually impoverished through lack of teaching.

*Where to from here?*

If you have any questions or comments concerning Followers you can Email me at [tonycollis@paradise.net.nz](mailto:tonycollis@paradise.net.nz), ring me at 04 970 3835 or write to...

Followers Network  
c/o Tony & Lynette Collis  
3 Coniston Street,  
Wainuiomata,  
Lower Hutt

## Appendix 1

### Network Leadership Team

#### **Tony & Lynette Collis**

Tony has served many churches around the country as an evangelist and consultant. He has been in full-time ministry for nearly twenty years serving as an evangelist with OAC Ministries for fifteen of those years during which time he was National Director for four years.

Tony lectures throughout the country in churches, conferences, Bible training institutions and seminars. He is the initiator of the Global Harvest Network website which serves a growing number of evangelists and churches throughout the country. He is a mentor to evangelists and an encourager to church leaders from many denominations.

Tony & Lynette have five children and live in Wainuiomata. Lynette home-schools the children whilst supporting Tony through hospitality, administration and wisdom. Lynette is involved with Cleansing Streams and ministers ably in her own right.

#### **Selwyn Stevens**

Selwyn Stevens, M.C.R.; Ph.D, is the President of Jubilee Ministries Trust Inc., a New Zealand-based organisation involved in informing and equipping Christians of all denominations how to reach the lost and deceived cults, the occult and secret societies such as Freemasonry. He is also a best-selling author, international speaker and ordained minister.

Selwyn is married to Anne who serves at Jubilee Ministries Trust Inc. and also is kept busy ministering and equipping believers. Anne works closely with Selwyn in the production of his many books and in the lecturing and prayer ministry during their seminars.

This team will continue to grow as the Lord provides the right people. Followers and the Leadership Team are being looked after by the covering of New Zealand Assemblies of God and key national and international Christians leaders. We are presently working on a Board of Reference.

## Appendix 2

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