

Introduction to Microchurches

What is church? What comes to your mind when people say “church”?

Most of the time we think of:

- A building
- A Sabbath worship program
- A congregation who is led by a theologically trained pastor who is being paid by the tithe that is collected each week (even if it is returned to the Conference first)
- An annual calendar of programs and events
- A global institution with a hierarchical administration structure

However, if you go back to the original church that Jesus launched, the movement had none of these. That doesn't mean that they were not church!

Biblical Background

Jesus only used the word “church” (ἐκκλησία) 3 times in the Gospels. When He did, Jesus defined the fundamental building block of church in this way:

“Truly, I say to you, whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven. Again I say to you, if two of you agree on earth about anything they ask, it will be done for them by my Father in heaven. For where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I among them.”

Matthew 18:18-20

Jesus is not focused on numbers, paid pastors or buildings in His vision of church. From His perspective, church is defined by His presence and His mission.

When Jesus sent out His disciples to grow His movement, He sent them out to establish discipleship communities:

After this the Lord appointed seventy-two others and sent them on ahead of him, two by two, into every town and place where he himself was about to go. And he said to them, “The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few. Therefore pray earnestly to the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest. Go your way; behold, I am sending you out as lambs in the midst of wolves. Carry no moneybag, no knapsack, no sandals, and greet no one on the road. Whatever house you enter, first say, ‘Peace be to this house!’ And if a son of peace is there, your peace will rest upon him. But if not, it will return to you. And remain in the same house, eating and drinking what they provide, for the laborer deserves his wages. Do not go from house to house. Whenever you enter a town and they receive you, eat what is set before you. Heal the sick in it and say to them, ‘The kingdom of God has come near to you.’” **Luke 10:1-12**

There was no promise of finances, buildings or paid professionals.

This picture of church is actually part of our Seventh-day Adventist identity and heritage. Think about the Sabbath commandment itself:

“Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy. Six days you shall labor, and do all your work, but the seventh day is a Sabbath to the Lord your God. On it you shall not do any work, you, or your son, or your daughter, your male servant, or your female servant, or your livestock, or the sojourner who is within your gates. For in six days the Lord made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them, and rested on the seventh day. Therefore the Lord blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy.” **Exodus 20:8-11**

Where does the Sabbath commandment mention a building? A Sabbath program? A theologically trained, paid leader? A calendar of programs? It doesn't!

Jesus' original vision for the Sabbath was that families gather together with the focus of sharing the Sabbath blessing of rest and peace with their family members and those who feel left outside the inner circle.

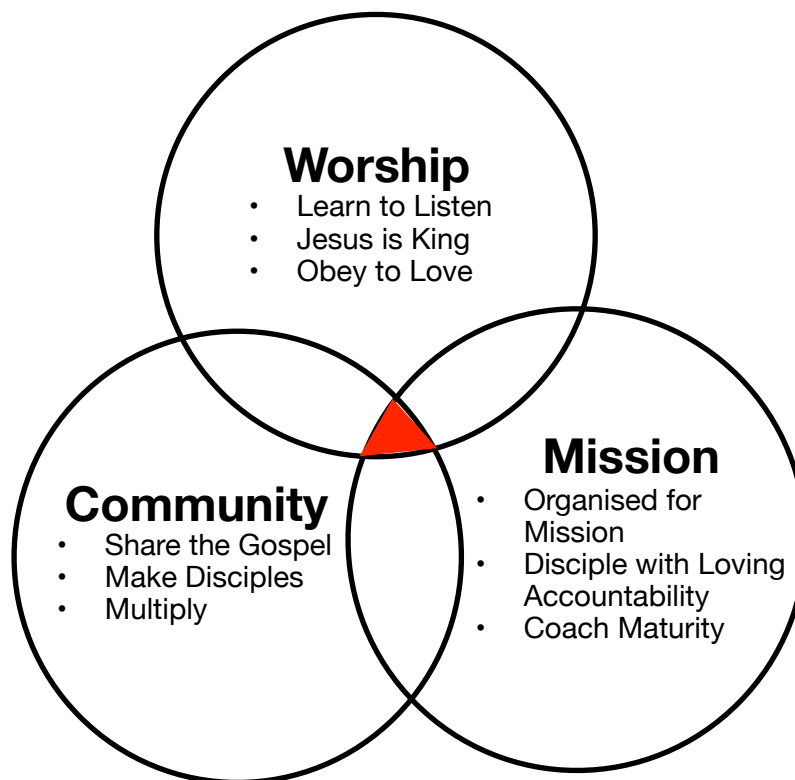
What is a Microchurch?

Microchurches are high-impact spiritual families. A micro church is an intentionally simple, streamlined approach to church that's often small, volunteer led and informal in style.

The ecclesiology of microchurches is simple. When followers of Jesus work together in **sincere worship** and **genuine community** to accomplish part of the **mission of God**, they are the church. It is not focused on the size of group or the building in which the group meets. The focus is:

- Connecting with God through interactive reading of His Word and conversational prayer
- Gathering together for food and fellowship
- Being on mission to transform the community for God's glory

The basic components of a microchurch are:



The centrepiece of a micro church is “calling”. Who is the Holy Spirit calling you to reach?

How do you Start a Microchurch?

Starting a micro church is personal—it begins with you. You need to ask yourself:

1. Am I missionary?
2. Am I called?
3. Am I spiritually healthy?

The bigger yet simple steps to starting a microchurch:

1. Build a team of missional followers of Jesus

2. Listen to the Holy Spirit to learn which focus group He is calling you to reach. Is it your neighbourhood, your school, your university campus, your small business community, your community of artists or musicians?
3. Ideate about how you can start to go on Jesus' mission and build caring relationships with people in that community
4. Gather weekly for worship, fellowship and discipleship
5. Serve your community where they have genuine needs
6. Invite them to join your discipleship community when the Holy Spirit leads you to
7. Grow leaders in the microchurch to launch new microchurches and multiple

How can you Achieve the Mission in a Microchurch?

Every mission will be different, because it depends on who you are trying to reach. However, the foundational strategies are:

- Saturating your own life with Jesus and His word
- Intentionally moving your connection with people in your focus group from Stranger to Acquaintance to Relationship

Stranger → Acquaintance → Relationship

Missional Questions for Microchurches

These are some valuable questions that you will need to ask as you launch your microchurch:

1. Who are you trying to love for the sake of the everlasting gospel? What are their names?
2. Do you know them as people? What do you know of their stories?
3. What are their real needs? Deep needs?
4. What ideas do you have to engage with these people and build a deeper relationship with them?
5. What is the timeline for you to try out your ideas? How often will you be meeting with people?
6. If you don't know the answers to these questions, how will you discover effective missional solutions to them?

Some possible mission focus groups during the lockdown:

- People in your neighbourhood
- Social media groups
- Colleagues you know from your workplaces

What does Worship look like in a Microchurch?

Worship in a microchurch is intentionally simple, which is appropriate for the size of the group. It often involves the following elements:

- A. Check-in time to see how the Holy Spirit has been working in the lives of the people in the group
- B. Reading through a Bible story (in multiple versions)
- C. Exploring this Bible story using a simple set of questions that people can easily remember and use
- D. Fun, interactive kid's activities
- E. Reflective discussion about the neighbourhood mission that has been accomplished.
- F. Conversational prayer time
- G. Fellowship over food

How can Microchurches Sustain Momentum?

For a movement of microchurches to be sustainable, it needs ongoing vision and direction. Some of the key vision-casting leadership and support that a microchurch network needs includes:

- Regular networking gatherings of microchurches, for example quarterly or even weekly at the moment during national lockdown
- Coaching, which can be provided by your network leader or our Conference church planting director
- Leadership training, which can also be provided by your network leader or our Conference church planting director
- Media production, for example the great work produced by our Conference communications director
- Corporate services, like electronic giving, Adsafe policies, financial services, risk management

It is important to remember that the larger expression of church exists to serve the smaller, not the other way around.

Resources for Growing Microchurch Networks

Brian Sanders, *Microchurches: A Smaller Way* 2019.

<http://asmallerway.com>

Matt Ulrich, *Microchurch Leader Essentials: A Microchurch Leader Field Guide* 2014.

<https://www.amazon.com.au/Microchurch-Leader-Essentials-Field-Guide/dp/1499726864/>

Warren Bird, "5 Trends in Microchurches" Outreach Magazine.

<https://outreachmagazine.com/features/25734-5-trends-microchurches.html>

Underground

church. network. movement.

<https://www.tampaunderground.com>

Everyday Church

<https://www.everydaychurch.com/microchurches/>

Ellen White, "Teaching and Healing" *The Ministry of Healing*, 139-160.

Nothing will so arouse a self-sacrificing zeal and broaden and strengthen the character as to engage in work for others. Many professed Christians, in seeking church relationship, think only of themselves. They wish to enjoy church fellowship and pastoral care. They become members of large and prosperous churches, and are content to do little for others. In this way they are robbing themselves of the most precious blessings. Many would be greatly benefited by sacrificing their pleasant, ease-conducting associations. They need to go where their energies will be called out in Christian work and they can learn to bear responsibilities.

Trees that are crowded closely together do not grow healthfully and sturdily. The gardener transplants them that they may have room to develop. A similar work would benefit many of the members of large churches. They need to be placed where their energies will be called forth in active Christian effort. They are losing their spiritual life, becoming dwarfed and inefficient, for want of self-sacrificing labor for others. Transplanted to some missionary field, they would grow strong and vigorous.

But none need wait until called to some distant field before beginning to help others. Doors of service are open everywhere. All around us are those who need our help. The widow, the orphan, the sick and the dying, the heartsick, the discouraged, the ignorant, and the outcast are on every hand.

We should feel it our special duty to work for those living in our neighborhood. Study how you can best help those who take no interest in religious things. As you visit your friends and neighbors, show an interest in their spiritual as well as in their temporal welfare. Speak to them of Christ as a sin-pardoning Saviour. Invite your neighbors to your home, and read with them from the precious Bible and from books that explain its truths. Invite them to unite with you in song and prayer. In these little gatherings, Christ Himself will be present, as He has promised, and hearts will be touched by His grace. *The Ministry of Healing*, 151,152.

[Note: Identify the missional principles of building relationships with your neighbours and people in your circle of influence. However, it is important to abide by government restrictions at this time with regards social distancing, house parties and meeting as groups outdoors. Pray for wisdom on how to creatively apply these principles at this time.]