

## 1 Opportunities & Possibilities

- Being Faithful to God's Covenant of Love

## 2 Introduction

- When we started our church and gave it the name Ekklesia, we did so not to be difficult, but to make an important statement.
- We wanted people to know that church is not a building or a service, but is instead a special “called out” people who are chosen by God's grace to be a light of revelation of His glory!
- And what is the glory of God?
- That He's good, fair, and just; and has got the power to fulfill His promises.

## 3 Our Vision & Mission Statements

- To bring Glory to God by showing forth the faithfulness and power He gives to those who carry out the Words of His Son Jesus Christ and in so doing provide evidence for others to believe and put their trust in God.
- So then, how are we going to be God's witnessing community to His glory?
- To become a biblically functioning community by structuring church life around the development of small groups (cells) so that meaningful and caring relationships can take place and thus create an atmosphere where God's Word can be practiced.

## 4 Covenant

- The reason why we meet in Cell Groups is not because we like small group dynamics, but to help structure church life so that we can be faithful to God's covenant of love.
- As the Scripture says, Carry each other's burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ. (Gal 6:2 NIV)  
And, The entire law is summed up in a single command: “Love your neighbor as yourself.” (Gal 5:14 NIV)
- While God's sovereign choice in election and covenantal offer is a free gift and not by works, fulfillment of His promises require our faith and faithfulness.

## 5 Solemn Agreement

- A covenant is a contract or solemn agreement between two or more parties.
- It can be between parties that are co-equal to each other or where one party is superior to the other.
- This later covenant is known as a Suzerainty Covenant and was used by kings and feudal lords to make agreements with their subjects or vassals.
- In fact, it is the Suzerainty Covenant that God chose to use to enter into a covenantal relationship with mankind.

## 6 Parts of a Suzerainty Covenant

- Preamble
- Historical prologue

- Stipulations
- Provision for deposition and periodic reading of the covenant
- List of witnesses
- Blessings and curses
- A formal oath on the part of the vassal
- Solemn ceremony
- Formulation for initiation action against the rebellious vassal.

## 7 **Biblical Examples**

- Preamble – This identified the Great King. “I am the LORD your God” – Deut. 5:6; Ex. 20:1-2.
- Historical Prologue – What the Great King had done for the vassals. “I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery.” – Deut. 5:6; Joshua 23: 9-10; Judges 2:1.
- Stipulations - The Great King’s rules and requirements. An example is the Ten Commandments (Ex. 20:3-17; Deut. 5:7-21).
- Blessings and Sanctions – This spells out the benefits for those who keep the treaty, and punishments for those who do not keep the treaty. (Deut. 5:32-33; 6:24-25; 7:9-11; Joshua 23:12-13).

## 8 **Biblical Examples**

- Deposit of Treaty/Public reading/Ceremony and sealing – Both parties kept a copy of the treaty in their sacred temples and vassals were required to publicly and regularly read the treaty so that succeeding generations understood their obligations. The treaty would be ratified in public ceremony that might include public signs or seals as reminders. (Exodus 24:1-8; Deut. 6:6-9, 20-25; Joshua 24:16-27).

## 9 **Important Point**

- The important lesson for us to learn about a Suzerainty Covenant is that it is a covenant of grace.
- It is a covenant where a superior (out of their own free will and choice) enters into a covenant with an inferior.
- However, while this covenant is by grace, the inferior must be faithful to the stipulations of the covenant, if they are to enjoy its benefits and blessings.

## 10 **Important Point**

- This is why we can talk of the New Covenant (Testament) as not by works, but has commandments and obligations in which to carry out.
- In other words, the New Testament is also a Suzerainty Covenant (covenant of grace), but for us to enjoy the promises, we must by faith obey its stipulations and requirements.

- So then, the primary purpose behind Ekklesia is to structure church life in such a way that will help facilitate us being faithful to the covenant of grace that God has given to us through Jesus Christ.

#### 11 **Form Follows Function**

- At Ekklesia we believe that form follows function.
- Or in other words, form and structure follow purpose.
- However, not every institution thinks this way.
- Some organizations rely upon tradition, trends, and the latest fad.
- Not that this is always wrong, but it helps to have understanding to why you do what you do.

#### 12 **Form Follows Function**

- If you don't know what you're aiming for, you'll probably won't hit your target.
- Again, the reason why we meet in Cell Groups is because it's hard to fulfill our covenant requirements, when we're unaware of our brother's and sister's need.
- How can you help carry your brother's or sister's burden, if we don't know what going on in their lives?

#### 13 **Form Follows Function**

- While Cell Groups are important to us, if another form were to better helps us to carry out our mission to be a biblically functioning community so that we bring God glory, then I would be all for that.
- However, until this happens, we at Ekklesia plan to emphasize both small group and large group gatherings as the chief form and structure of our church.
- But this doesn't mean there's no room for improvement.
- In fact, it has been a long time since we have done any kind of seminars or training sessions for our Cell Groups.

#### 14 **Form Follows Function**

- One of the reasons for this is because all our Saturdays have been taken up by our Celebration Services.
- Early on in our church, our Celebration Services were bi-weekly and on the off weekends, we had Cell Outreaches, Seminars, Conferences, and Prayer Meetings.
- It might be good for us to consider returning to these kinds of formats to help us retool, refocus, and strengthen our Cell Groups and other facets of our church.

#### 15 **Large Group Ministry**

- I'm not sure how many remember this, but when Ekklesia first began, the model for our Large Group gatherings was to take on the style of a banquet where we would all share a common meal as part of our gathering—much like the early church did during the 1st Century.

- In fact, our Family Fun night is a form of that function.
- Currently, we have a Banquet once per quarter and this event brings in more visitors than any thing else we do as a church.
- In 2012, we had 99 visitors to our church and most of them came during our Family Fun Night Banquets.

## 16 **Large Group Ministry**

- However, these banquets require a lot of work, and doing them more frequently might be too difficult for our church workers.
- So then, I have been investigating other possibilities.
- And one possibility is the Doubletree Suites Hotel off of Richmond Road.
- They have several meeting rooms and would be glad to accommodate our needs with catering for us a banquet for our Large Group meetings.
- While doing this every week would be cost prohibitive, we could afford this either once or twice per month—depending on what we order as food.

## 17 **Doubletree Suites - Lexington**

## 18 **Large Group Gatherings**

- In an event like this, we would have a sign up for dinner, which would probably start before 7:00 PM on Saturdays and the service would include worship, a children’s sermon, and a regular sermon or presentation.
- Everyone would be seated around tables to promote fellowship and children would sit with their parents or adult guardian.
- There would be limited setups and no cleanup or vacuuming.
- When we’re done with the service we can go home.

## 19 **Purpose**

- The purpose of such a change would not only help us develop community but also give us more flexibility.
- If we change the frequency of our Large Group gatherings, it would give us other options on the off weekends.
- We could go back to going on conferences, holding workshops on helping our Cell Group ministry, and having corporate prayer meetings.
- We could also look at starting a Children’s Cell Group on the weekend so that our Kid’s Church ministry may continue it’s important work of helping to disciple our children.

## 20 **Cell Group Outreach**

- When we use to have bi-weekly Celebration Services, we encouraged our Cell Groups to do outreach or ministry.
- Examples of Cell Group Outreach and Ministry would be . . .
  - Game Nights
  - Progressive Dinners
  - Visiting the Sicks
  - Prayer Night and other functions

## 21 Monthly Schedule

- Example of a possible Saturday Schedule . . .
  - Week One - Large Group Gathering in the form of a Banquet.
  - Week Two - Children's Group / Cell Group Outreach or Ministry
  - Week Three - Workshops, Conference, or Prayer Meetings
  - Week Four - Children's Group / Cell Group Outreach or Ministry
- Weekly Cell Group Meetings

## 22 Structure & Purpose

- How we structure our church should be in direct relationship to our purpose.
- God wants the church to be a biblically functioning community so that He can glorify the name of His Son Jesus Christ by answering our prayers and showing Himself having the ability to take care of our every need.
- In other words, as we are faithful to His covenant of love, He will be our God and we will be His people.
- As the Scripture says, But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light. (1 Pet 2:9 NIV)

## 23 Opportunity

- What I have outlined tonight is an opportunity that we might have as a congregation.
- It is more or less a new beginning for our church, which in more ways than not is a return to the original vision of our church.
- In two weeks, Sally and I are going to a conference near Cincinnati, Ohio sponsored by Dove Christian Fellowship, International.
- DCFI is a Cell Church organization that has churches all over the world. In fact, this organization is well familiar to us at Ekklesia as we have attended several of their conferences when our church was in its infancy.
- Our goal in visiting them is to solicit their help once again to help our church to fulfill our vision.

## 24 Opportunity

- While merger talks with Highpoint Church is still a possibility, we may nevertheless, want to be in charge of our own destiny and be about growing our church and fulfilling our vision.
- We have the flexibility to zig or zag depending on circumstances and opportunities that are before us.
- So let us be in prayer about these possibilities and let us pull together and fulfill our commitment to the Lord.
- He has given us a Covenant of Love so let us be faithful to it in order that He may glorify His name in the midst of us who believe. Amen.

## 25 Communion