

THE PARCHMENTS

Church Building Principles



*Barrie
Christian
Fellowship*

More Than Just Sundays.



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Preaching



A series on foundational principles in New Testament Church building, by head Pastor Ian Wilson:

In our annual meeting at the beginning of January, I mentioned, almost in passing, some of the words that I have considered to be strategic in laying the foundations of a New Testament Church. I had alliterated these words under the letter “P” in order that they may be better retained in our minds and that they would be familiar to us if I, or others, referred to them in the future.

I have always considered the preaching of the Word of God to be central to any sound and lasting local church. And so, we begin with the letter “P” for:

PREACHING: It is no coincidence that John’s Gospel commences with:

“In the beginning was the Word.” The Word of God WAS in the beginning in the book of Genesis and His Word has ever been paramount in all subsequent creations of God and, as the hymn writer describes the church, “It is His New Creation by Water and the Word.” There are some of our brethren that place Worship and Praise in equal importance to the preaching of the Word, but I believe that this is simply their own preference since it is not supported by Scripture. God had but one Son and when He came to earth He came as a PREACHER. In His opening manifesto, given in Luke chapter 4|18 – 19, we read: “The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because He has anointed me to PREACH the gospel to the poor; He hath sent me to heal the broken-hearted, to PREACH deliverance to the captives, and the recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised. To PREACH the acceptable year of the Lord.” So, there we have it. The opening verse of John, “In the beginning



THE WORD” and the opening manifesto, “PREACH”. Paul’s injunction to his disciple Timothy was: “PREACH the word in season (when conditions are favourable) and out of season (when conditions are difficult). But, whether easy or difficult, always be about the business of preaching. If you go to your concordance you will find an immense amount of references to preaching. The men who did the preaching, the people who were listening to the gospel being preached and the results that followed thereafter. The Gospel of Mark terminates with what is called the Great Commission: “Go ye into all the world and PREACH the gospel to every creature.” So, PREACHING is at the beginning, throughout the narrative of salvation and, finally, is committed to each generation to continue the good work. Although we usually begin our gatherings with praise and worship, that is not making the statement that praise comes BEFORE preaching in priority. It is simply the custom of the church in the West. In some churches the preaching of the Word comes first which, if it is done well, engenders a desire to praise and worship God. I believe that this was the order of the synagogues of old. Where the pulpit is weak in a local church all other things will suffer from a corresponding degree of dilution. “All scripture is given by inspiration of God and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness.” Thus, the pulpit is paramount in the correction, direction, and control of the believers’ conduct.

In summing up. We see that if the churches in the Book of Revelation had pastors who were faithful to the Word of God and had held to the legacy that had been handed down to them, a scant fifty years after the Lord returned to glory, Christ would have rebuked and reprovved them in the manner in which He did. The problem was with a compromised pulpit and, as it was then, so it is to this day. Strong, enlightened, bold, Bible-based preaching is the medicine for all things in an ailing church. It is for this reason we place primary emphasis on the pulpit here at Barrie Christian Fellowship.





The people of God are, without a doubt, a people of praise. Peter states in his first epistle that we are a “Holy priesthood called to show forth the PRAISES of Him who has called us out of darkness into His marvelous light”.

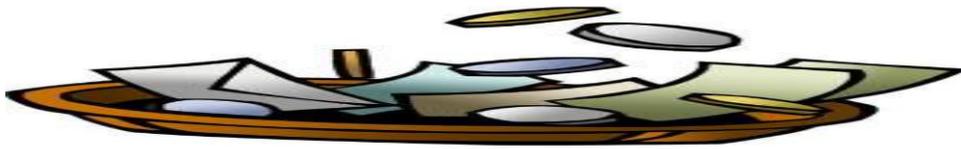
Much of the book of Revelation is devoted to scenes from heaven in which Angels and redeemed saints are joining together in offering praise before the throne of God. So, when we are involved in corporate praise and worship it is but a rehearsal for what is going to take place on an infinitely larger stage in the New Jerusalem. It is always of great assistance when our praise can be led by skilled musicians who minister out of surrendered hearts to the Lord. With harmonized instruments, harmonized voices and hearts that are moving in the unity of grace and love, amazing things can happen.

The Psalmist singer, King David knew about this when he wrote in Psalm 22: “The Lord dwells in the praises of His people.” Should it, then, be any great surprise to us when the saints lift up hearts, hands, voices and faces in worship to God that the presence of the Lord suddenly fills the gathering place? In Acts 15, when a debate was raging as to whether circumcision should be an established rite within the early church, James the Elder suddenly spoke forth and gave out a pronouncement that the Tabernacle of David would supersede the Tabernacle of Moses. There would be no circumcision required of new believers, but the key note of the gathered saints would be one of joyful praise. He then went on to say that if the Tabernacle of David was built again, then the Gentiles from all nations would bow down to the Lord. (paraphrased) Great praise, well led and with full volume of the saints sounding forth is surely one of the keys to revival and church growth. The Presence of God rests



upon His people and, in that atmosphere, the level of faith rises, and all things flow in the power of the Spirit.

Therefore, we place much emphasis on celebration when we meet together at Barrie Christian Fellowship.



“Bourse” is a French word (from which we derive the English word PURSE). It means “the place where the money is”. Church finances have always represented a challenge, in their collection, accounting and distribution. In the epistles, Paul speaks of taking up special offerings for the needy saints in Jerusalem., who were suffering persecution and had probably been prevented from making a decent living in their businesses. I have always believed (and observed) that God’s work done in God’s way will never fail to receive God’s financial support. For centuries, big buildings, oppressive mortgages and maintenance costs have sucked up untold billions of dollars in the Western church; money that could have been employed directly to building the Kingdom of God. There is a clear and self-evident principle in Scripture, namely that the focus of Church resources should be to spread the gospel by the preaching of the Word, for works of charity and care of the saints. In other words, “putting people first, not institutions.” The 12 disciples kept a small treasury for their own immediate needs. Judas oversaw the money and he was the wrong man for the job. He was a thief and he was covetous and, when he saw the extravagance of Mary, when he anointed the feet of Jesus with costly ointment, he went and sold out Christ for a few dollars. The saints took up offerings on a weekly basis for the needs of the members, support of the ministry and distribution to the needy, the government were not involved, nor was there any scrutiny from unbelievers. Thus, the burden of reaching the lost and advancing the Kingdom of God to all nations, resided with hundreds of local churches.

We have seen that the first church accountant was a crook. How important, therefore, that keeping the books be done with accuracy and integrity. Nowhere in the New Testament do we read that a specific amount be given by members into the church purse. Rather the HEART of the believer is appealed to in exhortations to give cheerfully and to give generously to the Lord. At Barrie Christian Fellowship we do not engage in emotional or persistent appeals for finances. Occasionally we bring specific needs to the attention of the congregation: perhaps an offering overseas for the orphans, or support for a couple going overseas on a mission, or a need within our own fellowship. Let everyone be convinced by the Lord as to their own donations to God's work. At any time, our church books are open if you wish to check on the state of our finances and, if you have questions concerning the accounts, you can address them to our fellowship treasurer. Since the subject of money is ever with us, whether in dollars, pounds, sterling, rupees or drachmas.



"Put it back. This isn't a 'Take a Penny,
Leave a Penny' dish."



PRAYER

John Wesley stated, “God does nothing but in answer to prayer.” I agree with him the only prayer that God never heard or answered was the prayer that was never prayed. In the Book of Acts we see that praying was a serious business. The assemblies of the saints were recorded as “Lifting up their voice to God with ONE accord. Individuals and smaller groups engaged in prayer. Answers, sometimes dramatic, were always forthcoming. When Paul was in Troas, in Acts 16, he saw a vision of a man from Macedonia pleading with him to come and help him. If we trace the origin of that vision, we come to a group of faithful women who met by a riverside outside the city of Philippi. They were led by a business lady called Lydia who was a “seller of purple.” These women prayed while they worked, and it was to this prayer group that Paul and Silas joined themselves. It is not a stretch of the imagination to say that the Philippian church had its origins in this prayer meeting. It was a church that was founded in intercession. Every believer should pray. It does not require a degree in theology to pray. Prayer is not an activity confined to the gifted or those who have been to Bible school. Rather, it is a call by Christ to EVERY ONE of His people. We need to pray earnestly, pray daily and pray faithfully. We need to pray with our spouses, pray with other saints, pray in secret when we go to our own closets and pray in public when the church is gathered. Jesus said, “Pray and do not faint”. Paul said that, “Men should pray everywhere, lifting up holy hands without wrath or doubting.” “Be instant in prayer.” That means if a situation arises, don’t wait until we get home but pray then and there. “Pray without ceasing”. That means to always have your heart postured Heavenward. Like the High Priest who wears the breastplate with the names of the tribes of Israel engraved on them. He may have been involved in other tasks, but the names of the people were always on his heart. When we pray, we PARTNER with God to advance His eternal purposes on earth. It is a mystery how God works through the prayers and



supplications of His people, but HE DOES. To give him opportunity for corporate prayer we have a weekly meeting. “A place where prayer is wont to be made.” (Acts 16:13) It is open to all who wish to join in shared faith and intercession. Here we are all able to pray in agreement and all rejoice together when answers come from Heaven.



Preparation of Men for Ministry

In Genesis chapter 14 an astonishing account is given to us of how one man, with servants BORN AND TRAINED in his own house, overcame a confederation of hostile tribes and recovered hostages and stolen property. We are speaking of Abraham who had trained his household servants to do battle and who, because they were born in his own house, were personally loyal to him. Transferring this thought to the household of God, we can see that the training and development of men should take place within the house of the local church. Jesus, Himself, trained men to take over the great task that He had begun. The word for this training is discipleship. The concept is simple but not easily accomplished. The original disciples were called by Christ and trained by Him for the short period of three years. They acutely observed the Master in ALL aspects of his life. They were in a practical, intense school of learning where they not only saw and heard but also had the opportunity of DOING. Finally, Christ endued them with His power when He returned to Heaven. They were then expected to get on with the job. At a local level, this principle of preparing men has been largely forsaken in today's Western Church. Instead, the task of training men has been handed over to seminaries, Bible Schools and para-church organizations. Men are no longer trained and developed in THEIR OWN HOUSE. It is a serious and sad omission that has left the vital process of secession largely to chance. It is within the local church that men, who are gifted and feel themselves called to ministry, should be given the opportunity to stir up those gifts under the supervision of wise, experienced leaders. Ideally those leaders should be listed among the ascension callings of Ephesians 4:11 – 12. Apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers should be aiming to reproduce themselves and “equip the saints for the work of the ministry”. When this happens, as Paul goes on to say later in the chapter, “The whole body grows to the edification of itself in love.”



That is a most telling truth.

“A church community that grows because of the gifts and callings **LATENT WITHIN ITSELF**: Preparing men is necessarily a slow and arduous process, but it is a sure one and a scriptural one. If it is followed it will result in succession of ministry and reproduction of local churches built upon that model. The secret then, is to get the biblical prototype right and **STICK WITH IT**. At Barrie Christian Fellowship that is what we intend to do.





An egg can not be yolk or albumen. Yes, an egg is a wonderful thing, but it must be enclosed in a shell to be manageable. Even so a church community can not simply be good fellowship, a good “word” and good worship (i.e. LIFE). Like the egg the life must be somehow contained. Not restricted but directed, in order to have maximum effect. Creation teaches us this truth as we read the first chapter of Genesis. Among the other staggering aspects of creation, we see that it was a WELL-PLANNED event. So, it is with the church (the new creation). When Paul had planted churches on his missionary journeys he would later return and “set things in order”. In other words, he went back to put a shell on the egg. Not everything that happens by the Spirit is spontaneous. God looks ahead and plans ahead and, if we are working with Him, we must do the same. God’s people are always more secure when they are informed as to what is happening and why. For this reason, we have practical documents called calendars, where future events can be recorded, and necessary preparations made so that those events can go well. The old adage “Fail to plan, plan to fail” is never more true than in the administration of a successful local church. This does not mean to say that the spirit is planned out; rather good planning ensures that frameworks are provided in which GOD CAN WORK.

The ark of Noah is a good example of this truth. The ark combined several aspects of important activity. There was the building of the boat itself and, within it, provision for the ‘guests’ on a long voyage. For this voyage there was pitching inside, and out and various compartments made for the occupants. However, above all, the ark was well designed. Plans were given by God, plans were followed by



From what I have observed, the demise of churches often stems from incompetent leadership. There are other factors that come into play, but churches are kept safe, kept on the tracks and kept on the ‘growth graph’ when there is prudent church government. The examples that I could give are too numerous to mention; of church ‘boards’ that put their congregations in huge debt, put God’s people under immense stress to keep the church rules or wear them out with endless meetings.

Good government will stay clear of these things:

There will be shepherding without oppression.

There will be preaching without condemnation.

There will be teaching with edification and pastoral care without intrusion; all these things being accomplished from the LARGE HEART that Paul refers to in 2 Corinthians chapter six.

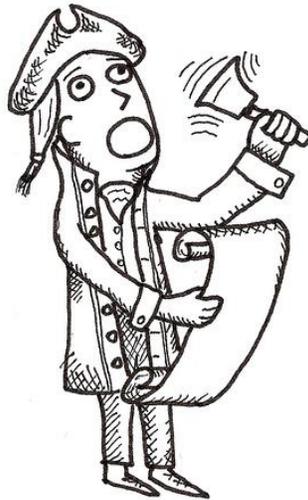
Prudent government will stop the trend among believers to ‘major in the minors’ and will keep the flock of God moving in broad areas of liberty, free from the heavy demands of legalism.

roclamation

The word proclamation (for us) can be defined as the Voice of God through His church to the world. The first chapter of Acts sees the extent of that proclamation and the manner in which it took place. Jesus said, “You shall receive power from on high. Go, therefore, into all the world and preach the gospel, beginning at Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria and unto the utter most parts of the earth.” A full reading of Luke’s account in Acts sees this sequence followed exactly. The apostles preached first in Jerusalem and Judea (Chapter 2 – 7) then in Samaria (Chapter 8) and in chapter 10 we see the message being preached to the gentiles and, eventually to Rome, the centre of the then known world. These boundaries are still being extended with tribes being reached in the New Guinea Highlands and the jungles of South America. Quite clearly, one small local church cannot be involved in every part of the earth. However, it does have its own Jerusalem, Judea and Samaria, these being the areas in closest proximity to where it is located. Anything beyond its own continent would be classified as the “Regions Beyond.” Our own Jerusalem and Judea we will count as Barrie and its environs. Samaria, we will call Simcoe County and the work that we support worldwide certainly qualifies as the ends of the earth. Such concern for peoples beyond our own country helps keep our church healthy. God has seen fit to put three seas in the region of the Holy Land: the Sea of Galilee, the Dead Sea and the Mediterranean Sea. The Sea of Galilee is where Peter first received his call from Christ to be a ‘fisher of men’. It is a small inland sea and, therefore, a local vision. In Acts chapter 10 he received another call to take the Gospel to the gentiles. This call was given when he was in Joppa by the Mediterranean Sea. The vast sea that speaks of the whole world.

But consider the Sea of Galilee. It has a river that enters from the North end that is fed from the snows Mount Hermon. The Jordan River exits from the South end; thus, the waters are kept continually fresh and flowing. However, the Dead Sea into

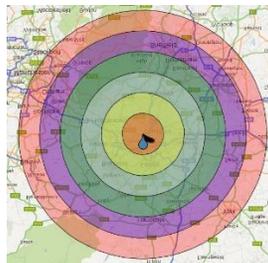
which the river Jordan flows there is no outlet and, therefore, its waters are stagnant and support no life. Any church that supports a vision outside its own small circumference will be a pool of fresh water which God will never cease to replenish with fresh resources of people and finances. So, let proclamation take place at all times to all people. We will make this one of our chief goals at Barrie Christian Fellowship.



P
parameters

Par Excellence

There are two parameters belonging to any local church that should be considered. The first is the geographic one. How far can people realistically travel for a gathering to be called their local church. In former days when people travelled by foot or horse drawn buggy, a five-mile radius in the country would be considered the outer limits. In our days when we drive fast, warm cars, a twenty-mile radius would still comprise “local”. I say this because, incumbent upon the congregation, is the question of pastoral care and also, how wide do we cast the evangelical net? In a large city a local church might have a ‘parish’ of no more than an area two miles square. Barrie and where we meet, could have a legitimate boundary that takes in Orillia, Barrie, Elmvale, Innisfil, Thornton, Cookstown and environs; in other words, a 30-minute drive to attend our Sunday service. As for the doctrinal boundaries, we say that we are limited by the orthodoxy of the Nicene Creed. I know of no better statement of faith than that which comprises the enthronement of God Supreme. His only begotten Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, His virgin birth, His redemptive work on the cross, His death, burial and resurrection on the third day his ascension into heaven and the giving of the Holy Ghost. The universal and local church, the return of Christ in power and glory and the everlasting abode of the saints in Heaven. To exceed these boundaries of truth will lead to complications, unprofitable disputes and inevitable divisions. So, parameters: 20 miles for our radius; for our doctrine.





To all building designs there must be added the engineer's stamp; to all construction sites must eventually come the building inspector, hopefully to give his approval. That inspection takes place at each major phase of construction, beginning with the footings, the foundation and, later, the final expansion. Paul, in 1 Corinthians 2, makes reference to how the church should be built and the materials that should be used. Wood, hay, stubble will not pass the test; only the excellent and expensive materials of gold, silver and precious stones will endure the final inspections of God.

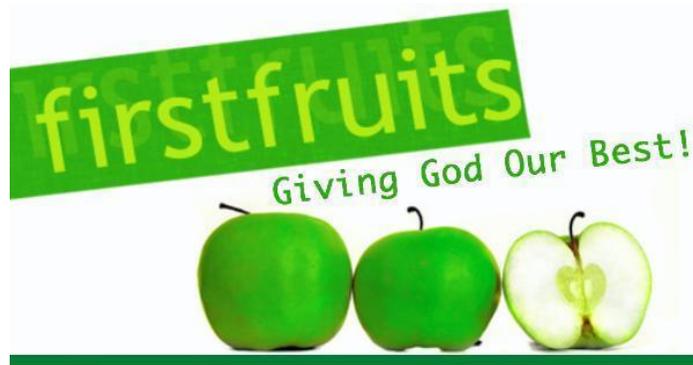
In the preceding chapters we have laid down some of the designs and principles of building New Testament churches. These principles have been drawn from the scriptures and have also been signed by the hard experience of myself and others. Every Christian is involved in the great work of being a co-laborer with God. The Kingdom of God is being established on earth and the Church of God is being built for all eternity. What a marvelous privilege it is to be involved in such a grand endeavour. God does not demand perfection from us. How could He, since we are imperfect vessels? BUT we ARE to give forth our best in terms of our offerings of service and the employment of our talents. Jesus taught that there is special reward in the wise expenditure of our time, treasure and talents.

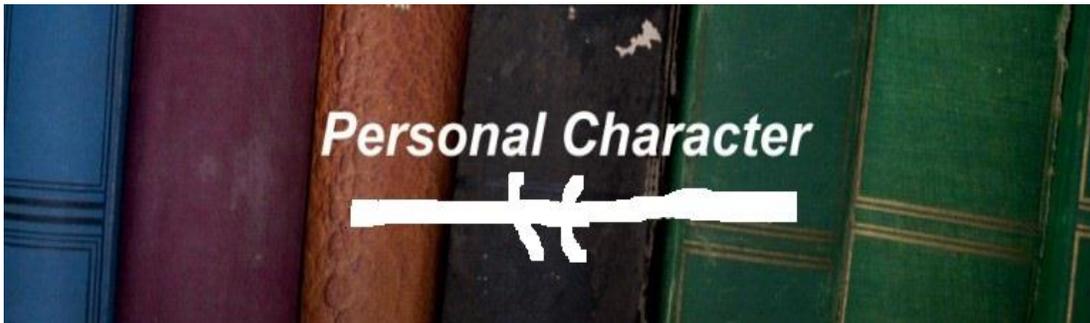
When in Philippians 1, Paul says: "Approve those things that are excellent", he is making a reference to the building codes and standards by which God Himself works when in Genesis 1 God pronounced "it is good" after each new day. So, does God expect our BEST in all the areas in which we serve Him: in our giving, in our daily labor, in the management of our earthly business and in the roles we play in His church, whatever they may be. In the Old Testament, the sacrifices that were offered to God were to be without blemish and of the harvests, the Lord required the first fruits. (which were the sweetest) People were not to give their left overs or make the House of God like a drop-off box.

So, we see that excellence was required as a STANDARD in service and ministry. Paul summed the matter up when he said; "Whatsoever you do in word, deed or thought, do all to the glory of God." If we keep this text on the walls of our heart



and make a watchword in our lives, we shall never fail to experience the favor or the King as we serve within His courts.





While preaching, giving and praise can all be graded, the standard of purity within a local church must only be measured by the New Testament word, “blameless.” If the conduct of the members be classed as such, the mouths of critics OUTSIDE the church will be stopped and the mouths of the saints INSIDE the church will be opened to the edification of each other and in praise of God.

Simple as that.

The early church in the Book of Acts was kept in purity and growth by the fear of God in which they walked, the Apostles doctrine which was preached and the quality of love which they mutually shared. Excluding people from the fellowship was only an act of last resort. Such judgements, to prevent the “little leaven leaving the whole lump”, are committed to the good government of the congregation and, hopefully, are only exercised in rare situations. I have found that, in keeping things simple, things are usually kept clean and that is what healthy church life is all about.



There is no substitute for consistent pastoring. The hands on, personal contact that all human beings require for their lives to be seen as special and important to God. The word ‘pastor’ is connected with ‘pasture’, where the flock grazes. The pastor can be defined as the person who looks after the pasture and the flock that feeds there. Some churches may have a weak pulpit, but if they are served by a dedicated, loving pastoral staff they will grow and flourish under their care. Love in practice IS care. The scriptures speak of “the members having the same care one for the other.” Therefore, we understand that pastoring in a fellowship does not belong solely to a professional minister who is paid to ‘hatch, match and dispatch.’ The love of God flows through each brother and sister in the congregation, however, we see from Ephesians 4:11 – 12 that pastors are given to the church as a gift from God. Recognizing each called and gifted people and setting them free to move among the congregation is the secret to church growth. These people may not have Bible College training, but they WILL have large, loving, caring hearts and, as such, are indispensable to the flock of Christ. They observe some brother or sister missing from the gathering and make a phone call to find out why. They notice someone who is downcast and come alongside to pray. They hear of someone who is ailing and sally forth with an oil bottle to anoint them. They counsel those who are in need of direction, shield those who are in need of protection and comfort those in need of consolation. They run small groups and teach. They make house and hospital calls, not for special recognition but because they have a heart for God’s people. Much of their labor may go unnoticed and unrewarded, but they are known in Heaven and they are rewarded in the way that God alone bestows favour. Paul, in his wrap-up of the Roman epistle, commends such people. In fact, the preceding fifteen chapters of theology are given faces and names in the sixteenth chapter. It is as if Paul is saying ‘This is how it works and here are the reasons and the living examples to add to the theory. In every church there are people like Aquilla and Priscilla (mentioned

in Romans 16) who show uncommon love and dedication to God and His family. I am glad to say they are at work in Barrie Christian Fellowship and may make my own calling a joy to fulfill.





Programme

What about the place we meet?

Over the years I have preached in a wide variety of buildings. There have been storefronts, old warehouses, areas in shopping malls, converted movie houses, Anglican, Baptist, Methodist and Pentecostal purpose-built churches, large houses and small houses to mention a few. The location in which God's people meet will vary from country to country and culture to culture but for the premises to be viable for people to meet in it must have:

- 1) Clean working toilets and wash basins.
- 2) Accessible parking space.
- 3) Good lighting and, in Canada, adequate heating.
- 4) Comfortable seating.
- 5) Readable overhead or hymn books.
- 6) Reasonable acoustics.
- 7) Wherever possible a good ground floor location.
- 8) A safe and secure nursery.

Anything above these things, while a welcome addition, is probably superfluous to the growth of the church. If there is a warm welcoming atmosphere and a quiet environment where the gospel can be preached without interference from the city authorities or from irate neighbours, we are in good shape. We are blessed at Barrie Christian Fellowship to have a central location, clean and commodious.

The Mega-Church with its multi-dimensional ministry, huge building complexes, run with the latest electronic equipment and twenty or thirty thousand in the congregation is a largely twentieth century American phenomenon. It is a type of enterprise a whole planet removed from the simple templates of the church in the Book of Acts. Here, the meetings were generally held in homes. No offices or educational facility were attached to the house. It followed that there was a decentralizing of all daily life and mid-week activity AWAY from the building,



which helped immensely when the authorities came searching to arrest the members. This molecular type of structure is widely in place in China where, in the 1960's, the simple New Testament model was followed by people like Watchman Nee and Witness Lee. The very flexibility of this "wineskin" has allowed for a national church that is currently estimated at 200 million in number. Doubtless, in the early church, there were arrangements made for the teaching of children and, it is in this regard, we have employed a simple programme for our children at Barrie Christian Fellowship. As we grow, there will doubtless be others but, count on it, there will be no camels or shepherds flow in from the Holy Land.



PLURALITY

Plurality is THE functional word in the church, although it is a word that is never mentioned in the New Testament. However, we see it in OPERATION through the Book of Acts in its EXPLANATION through all the epistles. In Acts we read of people who worked in a team. Part of the team were in the field and other members stayed in the home church

In Acts chapter 13, some of the “Plurality” are named for us; people like Lucius, Niger and Manaen. They are never mentioned again in the narrative, but they were critical to the success of Paul, Barnabas and Mark who were sent out from Antioch on the first apostolic journey.

In Acts chapter 6 we have seven members of the home based serving team appointed as deacons. In the Gospels we have a list of women who looked after the practical needs of Christ and His disciples (the feeding of five thousand was not the only meal that was eaten in their three years of ministry!) As we look at the epistles, the actual structure of these teams is explained.

For example, in 1 Timothy 3, Paul expands on the role of bishops (elders) and their duties and then goes on to speak about the deacons who serve alongside them in plurality. In Ephesians chapter 4, we have the ascension gifts listed: apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers; sometimes referred to as the ‘five-fold’ ministry. Professional ministers were not considered to be part of the church-

building equation, although Paul makes clear that those who ministered in the word should be rewarded for doing so. In 1 Corinthians 12, a plurality of nine charismatic gifts is listed by Paul and, two chapters later, an explanation is provided as to how such gifts are to be exercised and how people are to respond when they are functioning.

The church assemblies in the Book of Acts were exciting places to be. Christ was in the midst by His Spirit and the manifestation of LIFE was flowing through every member of the body, male and female alike. We study these biblical models and see that they were simple but strong enough to allow for the mighty moving of God's power within their frameworks. Bringing God to His people and facilitating God's people to come to Him is what church life is all about – and that takes place when EVERYONE is involved.

That is PLURALITY in action.

