

Jason Shepperd

eDNA

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Church Project started in 2010 as a “Church of House Churches”. What began with 40 people and two House Churches has turned into a movement of thousands of people, in many House Churches locally. And, other Church Projects have been planted regionally, nationally, and globally.

Church Project began as a pursuit to return to what Jesus originally intended for the church to be. A deep study of the church biblically, historically, and globally revealed what I defined as “**eDNA - Ecclesiological DNA**”. This DNA of the structure of the church was given early, and should be applied to all people, in all places, at all times.

The elements of this eDNA are:

- Decentralized from Primary Place and Priest
- Distributed Pastoral Leadership
- Diverse Discipleship Communities

Paul told Titus: *“The reason I left you in Crete was to...straighten out what was unfinished... appoint elders in every town as I directed you...teach what is in accord with sound doctrine...”*

Paul gave Titus a blueprint for pastoring the island of Crete. Paul shared the gospel, people became followers of Jesus, and Paul planted a church. But then Paul left to do what Paul was primarily

called to do, and he sent Titus, but with clear instructions on the role Titus was to assume- and not assume.

DECENTRALIZED FROM PRIMARY PLACE AND PRIEST

Paul did not want Titus to be heading to every town in Crete to pastor people in the places where they lived. And Paul did not want all of the people to leave their towns and travel to a primary place, for a primary pastor in Titus.

Paul wanted the ministry in Crete to be DECENTRALIZED from primary place, and primary priest. Though Paul came from the background of primary place- the temple or the synagogue, Paul knew now that the believers themselves were the “temple of the Holy Spirit”, and their was a “priesthood of all believers.”

Church Project has no phone number. No receptionist in a foyer. No central place to come to for information or connection. Yet, thousands of people are connected into House Church communities, 1:1 Discipleship relationships, and serving in local and global Ministry Partnerships. The name of the lead pastor isn't on the sign or the website. People are immediately connected directly into the House Church closest to where they live.

DISTRIBUTED PASTORAL LEADERSHIP

Paul did not want Titus to assume the role of pastoring all of Crete. The weight would have been too much. Paul told Titus to choose godly people to pastor the believers, wherever they lived.

Paul wanted all people to have access to a pastor. If that had to happen through Titus, that would be overwhelming for Titus. And it would be limiting the pastoring that needed to be available to all of the people. And... it would be robbing other qualified people from fulfilling their calling.

Paul told Titus to look for certain qualifications, and likely certain qualities of leaders for the churches that would be meeting in homes throughout Crete. And, Paul wanted Titus to ensure that sound doctrine was being taught by each of the pastors to all of the people. So, Titus' primary role became to select, prepare, and oversee all of the pastors who were pastoring all of the people, and **DISTRIBUTE** the pastoral responsibilities to them.

House Church Pastors at Church Project are people who live with the biblical qualifications and qualities listed in Titus and Timothy. House Church Pastors have full time jobs in the workforce, yet fully pastor their House Church. House Church Pastors perform weddings and funerals, and visit people in the hospital. All benevolence happens in House Church.

DIVERSE DISCIPLESHIP COMMUNITIES

The church should pursue the diversity commanded in Scripture. **DIVERSITY** is multi-layered: generational, socio-economic, spiritual maturity, cultural, marital. The church in Scripture had rich and poor, mature and immature believer, married & unmarried/divorced/widow/never married, different colors of skin and customs and backgrounds...

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Diversity is truly tested not in large auditoriums, but in small living rooms and around kitchen tables. Many people have never been in a committed community with true layers of diversity.

Church is most often referred to as family, much more than friends. Yet, the construct of community in most churches is towards homogenous life-stage friendships, rather than heterogenous diverse families.

Diversity is forced by gathering geographically. Gathering geographically accomplishes several beautiful benefits:

- It keeps community within proximity. Community is more sustainable within proximity. I have less travel time to get to my House Church. My kids are going to school with other kids from House Church, parents know one another, we're shopping at the same grocery stores, same coffee shops, etc.
- Removes administrative complexities and structures for connecting people into homogenous groups. People simply find the House Church closest to them, and go there.
- The only distinction of a House Church is its geography, not its affinity. So people know they will be accepted, as there are not special identifiers for this community.

At Church Project we have House Churches filled with married and unmarried, older and younger, rich and poor, and different stages of spiritual maturity. The spiritually mature are discipling



the spiritually young. The older are mentoring the younger in marriage and parenting and life. Those with financial resources are helping those in need. It's a beautiful diverse family.

LEADER TO PASTOR, GROUP TO CHURCH

At Church Project, we are essentially taking a teacher or leader, and making them a pastor. We identify, equip, empower, and expect people to fully pastor their House Church.

And, we take a class or a group, and we make it a church. We take the limits off of what a class or group does, and expect this small community to operate as fully as a church together as the Scriptures tell us to.

THEOLOGY OF SPACE

A theology of space is crucial for this Decentralization, Distribution of pastoral leadership, and radical generosity. "Space is not Sacred, but Sacred things happen in Space" is a phrase coined at Church Project to help bring clarification to a proper theology of space. Because space is not sacred, space can be Shared, and Stewarded. Space is shared with many ministries in our city who need space for events, training, etc. And, space is designed in such a way that it can be stewarded, and actually attain mortgage neutrality.

SIMPLICITY FOR THE SAKE OF GENEROSITY

Additionally, Church Project operates with "Simplicity for the Sake of Generosity." Because all House Church Pastors are not paid

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for pastoring their House Churches, and the front lines of pastoring is happening through House Church Pastors, less paid staff are required. And because space can be mortgage neutral with a proper theology of space, less money is spent on buildings. And, because Jesus operated with simplicity throughout His ministry, less money can be spent on unnecessary approaches to ministry.

The result is the opportunity to be radically generous. Church Project has directed over \$12 million to date toward ministries and church plants outside of the operational walls of our church.

I write much more about this in my book, “A Church of House Churches.”

This eDNA is self-sustaining, simple, and effective. Jesus said He would build His church, and His building plans are enduring across all people, in all places, for all times. Enjoy!

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GET BACK TO GOD'S ORIGINAL DESIGN FOR PASTORING HIS CHURCH

Let's begin by **rethinking** and **returning**.

A biblically articulated and applied ecclesiology is happening in churches at a growing rate. Together we are walking out leading in Jesus' plans for His church, and encouraging each other along the way.

Jason Shepperd planted Church Project, a Church of House Churches, in 2010 in The Woodlands, TX. With no people, no place, no money, and no outside support, Church Project started as nothing more than an idea. Since 2010, thousands now gather weekly in local "House Church" communities, and millions of dollars have been directed to gospel-centered ministries.

Jason has also started and oversees Church Project Network, House Church Network, Good City and START WITH 7.

RESOURCES FOR CHURCH LEADERS & CHURCHES

CHURCH PROJECT NETWORK

HOUSE CHURCH NETWORK

CHURCH PROJECT (THE WOODLANDS, TX)

GOOD CITY

START WITH 7 AUDIO DEVOTIONALS