



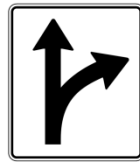
# FIVE CHARACTERISTICS OF ALTERNATIVE CHURCHES

*By Bill Faris – Vineyard at Home*

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# Introduction

## □ Alternative Churches: Use of the Term –



- As I am using the term in this presentation:

Alternative” churches are traditionally evangelical in their doctrinal foundations but depart from traditional or conventional evangelical churches in their modality of church life and structure

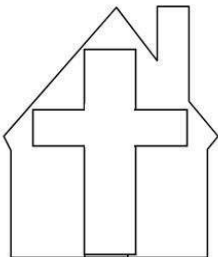
# PART ONE -



## FIVE DIFFERENTIATIONS OF ALT-CHURCHES

# Five Differences - 1

- Alt-Churches are different in STRUCTURE
  - Emphasize simplicity
  - Minimize complexity of leadership structure, programming and function
  - Often referred to as “Simple”



# Five Differences - 2

- Alt-Churches are different in FUNCTION
  - Often more fluid and flexible in how they practice worship, fellowship and mission
  - Less “brand-focused” in their outward expression
  - Often described as “Organic”



# Five Differences - 3

- Alt-Churches are different in FOCUS
  - Emphasize high levels of member participation in meetings, decision-making and mission
  - Avoid “top-down” style of leadership, vision-casting
  - Often described as “Open”





# Five Differences – 5

## □ Alt-Churches are different in PURPOSE

- Emphasize a call to serve particular neighborhoods, people groups, campuses or other specific points of mission
- Often described as “Missional Communities”





# PART TWO

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## Five Characteristics of Alt-Churches

- Simplicity
- Adaptability
- A Christ-Centered Ethos
- A Missional Focus
- A High Level of Member Ownership/Participation

# Characteristic One: Simplicity

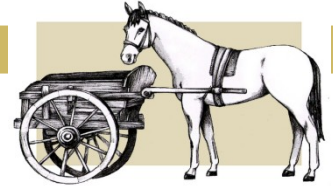
## □ **Alt-Churches CELEBRATE simplicity**

See simple agendas, structure and emphases as  
DESIREABLE

- Simple is Flexible
- Simple is More Reproducible
- Simple is More Empowering to Every Member
  - \* Vineyard Lingo: “Everyone gets to play...”
- Simple is more resource efficient
- Simple connects discipleship to “doing” and not just “knowing stuff”



# Characteristic Two: Adaptability



## □ **Alt-Churches CELEBRATE adaptability**

See adaptability as an important part of their **MISSIONAL EMPHASIS**

- Adaptability allows for changes in agenda – days, hours, minutes – even seconds (rather than weeks or months)
- **Adaptability allows for essentials of the faith to be emphasized (Gemstone gets the focus, not the Setting)**
- Adaptability puts the Mission before the Structure (not the other way around)
- **Adaptability allows higher percentage of membership to introduce new initiatives or solve problems**
- Adaptability means **HEAVY** in our convictions, **LIGHT** on our feet!

# Characteristic Three: A Christ-Centered Ethos



## □ **Alt-Churches CELEBRATE Jesus!**

See Jesus Christ at the Center and at the Head

*Ethos: “the fundamental character or spirit of a culture; the underlying sentiment that informs the beliefs, customs, or practices of a group or society; dominant assumptions of a people or period” (Dictionary.com)*

- De-emphasize Church brand or leadership personality to focus on the essential presence of Jesus in the community
- **SPOTLIGHT** is on Jesus as opposed to buildings, programs, etc.
- Ancient church confession of “Jesus is Lord” not merely a statement of faith but a philosophy of ministry and church life

# Characteristic Four: A Missional Focus



## □ **Alt-Churches CELEBRATE their mission!**

J.D. Payne – characteristics of MISSIONAL house churches for the purposes of his study

- At least one new baptism per year
- One daughter church every three years
- An emphasis on serving others as a community of believers

Thom Ranier (Lifeway Christian Resources – as quoted by Payne):

96% of American churches do not meet the criteria for being effective evangelistic churches

- **Missional communities emphasize relationship and servant evangelism over program or attractional features**

# Characteristic Five – A High Level of Member Participation

- Alt-Churches **celebrate** high participation of all members – both sexes, all ages, all spiritual maturity levels
- Turns the so-called “Pareto Principle” (80/20 Rule) upside down
- Previous four characteristics invite higher levels of member participation
- As determined by: needs, gifts, opportunities
- Looks more like what we see in the Bible / Historic renewal movements
- “Every member a minister” for real!



# PART THREE

## □ Conclusion

- Currently, about 5% of American evangelical churches fit “Alternative Church” descriptor

That number is stable and even growing a bit

2007 – 3% of American school-aged children are home schooled (USA Today) – growing, too

Similar rises in home-based businesses, etc.

# Questions or Comments?

□ [www.Vineyardathome.com](http://www.Vineyardathome.com)

□ [Bill@vcmn.org](mailto:Bill@vcmn.org)

□ Book: *Homegrown: Our First Steps in Bringing the Church Back Home*, By William T “Bill” Faris

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