

Phil and Phoebe Anderson in their THE HOUSE CHURCH [Abingdon/75, pp.132f] have a simple layout on this subject. Their long experience--especially Phil's, as in his CHURCH MEETINGS THAT MATTER--underlines the need for clear contracting and thus structure-order-accountability. What applies to a spiritual group [here, "house church"] applies even more to a work group, such as a higher-education seminar.

a contract. The members must agree upon their goal, their ways of proceeding, their length of life as a house church and when they will renegotiate their agreement. There is no ideal contract, no model which will meet every house church's needs. There are only major matters to be made explicit and agreed upon. Perhaps at the second or third meeting following the initial one, members will be able to clarify their agreement with one another.

The essential components of a house church contract are threefold and quite simple. Each component can be expanded and enlarged and made more specific according to the particular situation of the house church.

1. *Objectives.* What are the purposes, goals, intentions, tasks of this house church? What do we want to do and to be?
2. *Methods.* How shall we proceed in each meeting? Who will be leader? Who is responsible for food, mailings, convening, hostessing, "working?" How many hours shall we meet at any one time, and how many weeks or months shall we continue as a house church before we renegotiate this agreement? When or how can new members be added?
3. *Evaluation.* How shall we evaluate and when?

Clarification of objectives, specific detailing of methods, and agreed-upon expectations of evaluation free the members of a house church to continue in full support of one another. By knowing in explicit detail what the nature of one's commitment to others is, in time and in relationship, a person can question or clarify or revoke his participation with honesty and openness.

A house church contract can be diagrammed in a triangle. Each point of the triangle is necessary if the form is to be complete; and the interaction between the points goes in two directions.

Without a contract, a house church falls victim to the moods of a given day, domination by talkative members, too much socializing, there-and-then reporting, or dependence upon certain persons. Nor does the group know what to do about the inevitable request to admit new members.

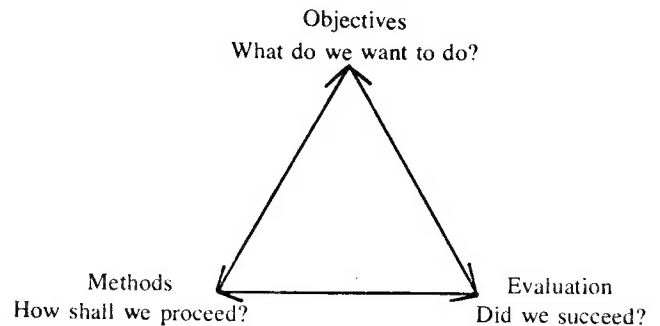


Figure 5. Model of a House Church Contract

The arrow running between Objectives and Methods suggests that the procedures chosen to implement the goals, the means selected to achieve the ends have to be appropriate. If they are not or when they are not, the Evaluation will reveal the failure or incompleteness and will indicate that either the Objectives or Methods were insufficient in some way. Either the house church aspired to do more than they could do, or else the Methods they chose were not appropriate for the attainment of their goals.

A composite case study of a house church which tried to develop a life without making a contract follows. Although this is a fictional account, it is representative of many of the problems house churches without contracts have encountered.

A Case History

Ten persons, three couples and four single persons, began meeting three years ago as a study group. After one year they invited in an outside leader and shared an intensive house church experience. The group flourished under this impetus and in the course of the next year took in two additional couples as members. From the beginning the group had maintained a project of supporting a local retirement home, being on call to drive persons or talk with them or conduct study sessions for them. All agreed that this ongoing project had held the house church together.