

Strange Things in Xenos or Why Xenos will never be a model for other churches

[Cell group study format: This study of Xenos distinctives takes students into most areas of ecclesiology in an interesting and interactive way. Churches' distinctives often point to their philosophy of ministry in a revealing way. Make copies for each member. Have a cell member read one of the distinctive explanations. Then each mark your copy on the ratings, and spend a moment thinking about your answer to the questions. Than compare your answers, and debate any differences.]

By Dennis McCallum

Some observers have noted that Xenos is unusual. We agree. Our observations of other churches indicate that we are different than most other churches in quite a few ways. Some are central, and some are fairly peripheral. Of course every group has its idiosyncrasies, but Xenos seems stranger than usual. Why do we feel the need to do things differently? That depends. Xenos didn't come out of an existing church, so we had no tradition to serve. We have agreed we don't want to be different just to be different. But at the same time, we find that these differences are a good way to understand the thinking and values behind Xenos. Most of our odd features are the result of our own reasoning process and experience. For each feature, click to read a short explanation of what the difference is, and why we do it that way. Please note that we don't claim other churches should be like us. We learn from other churches all the time, and appreciate that there is more than one way to skin a cat!

<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Home group leadership requirements far higher than other churches 2. Ministry houses 3. No designated giving 4. Eldership limited in earning and assets 5. No worship services 6. Home group leaders handle all weddings, visitations, and funerals 7. All staff and eldership required to be in a home group 8. Home group leaders handle all church discipline 9. Staff hiring limited to members 10. Prioritized ethics 11. High level of content 12. Three-level structure instead of two 13. Unique planning approach 14. Church planting is a prerequisite for high leadership roles 15. Class system far more extensive than 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 17. Entire teams formed, funded, and sent to foreign fields 18. Most home groups with team leadership 19. Generate all our own children's curriculum 20. Over 50% of attendees involved in discipleship dyad 21. Extraordinarily high percentage of those in youth groups are non-Xenos kids 22. No scripted ministry approach for lay leaders 23. Secular music at student ministry meetings 24. Students do expository Scripture teachings to large and small meetings 25. Home support teams for missions 26. Youngest large church in America? 27. No formal membership 28. Most top leadership involved in youth ministry 29. Most ministry teams initiated by individuals, not staff
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other churches 16. Urban community development ministry far more extensive	30. Two lead pastors instead of one 31. Question and Comment time at main meetings 32. Strange name 33. Planting Celebrations
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Explanations

Home group leadership requirements unusually high. How churches manage to train competent leaders during a 1 to 8 week training program is a complete mystery to us at Xenos. Our training program takes several years of classroom and field training. Our typical leader has completed:

- 210 hours of classroom instruction with homework and graded exams
- 2 to 5 years of personal mentoring from an older believer
- Have either won non Christians to Christ, or at least have brought people who were converted
- Have won one or more individuals into a personal discipleship relationship
- Have lead a cell group (within their home church) with growth and spiritual advancement in the members' lives
- Have a proven character like that required for deacons in 1 Tim. 3

Why do we insist on such a high level of training for leaders? First, Xenos home group leaders are responsible for leading and caring for groups that typically range from 15 to 60 people. These groups are "home churches," not cell groups like in most churches. A home church is a medium-sized group with a team of leaders. Since each home group takes care of it's own leadership training, evangelism, pastoral work, teaching, worship, etc., we feel the leaders need to be competent spiritual ministers (deacons) who are well-trained and capable of some sophistication. When you think about what leaders have to do you see why:

- We expect our leaders to motivate their people biblically, which entails not just relying on groupthink or sociological pressure, but actually persuading members that Christian goals are correct and urgent.
- Such persuasion implies that leaders know the Bible well enough to be persuasive in all major areas of Christian teaching.
- Our leaders have to be prepared to answer questions about all areas of Christian teaching and thought.
- They have to be prepared to lead their home church in waging spiritual warfare, so they have to know about Satan and how to avoid aberrant teaching in this area.

- They have to be competent to counsel people through typical non-clinical problems.
- They have to conform to the character requirements of deacons as detailed in Scripture, which often entails some years of growth.
- They have to be mature enough to work on a leadership team without competing or fighting.
- They have to be able to train their upcoming leaders in evangelism, follow up, discipleship, pastoral work, Bible teaching, etc. This implies they know these areas themselves.
- They have to serve as models of Christian living. In other words, their own lives have to be stable and their relationships (including marriages) should be basically healthy.

Considering what leaders need to be able to do, we don't understand why anyone would think we could develop good leaders in a few weeks or even a few months. In fact, we think one of the reasons churches are reluctant to completely delegate true responsibility to lay leaders is their shallow level of training. They know intuitively that they can't trust their under-trained leaders with sophisticated ministry because they are incompetent. But if this is true, who's fault is it?

For Discussion:

- Are you aware of any other churches that like Xenos here?
- Do you think Xenos should change in this area?
- Do you think this difference is peripheral or central? On a scale from 1-10, rate this difference from 1 = unimportant to 10 = extremely important

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How do you support your answer?

2. Ministry Houses - Xenos operates over thirty rooming houses dedicated to discipleship and evangelism. These houses typically have 5 to 12 men or women (but not both) living in them. The members usually subscribe to a ministry house covenant, which is an agreement to be accountable to their roommates for involvement and basic Christian living. During our past history, ministry houses have been exceptionally effective at developing leaders in Xenos. They also cooperate with their respective home churches in outreach projects and parties.

Single Christians in Xenos commonly live in a ministry house for several years. College home churches all operate 2 to 6 houses each, and the overwhelming majority of college members live in ministry houses. Adult home churches also have ministry houses for their singles. All together, at time of writing, Xenos has over 30 ministry houses.

Ministry houses have proven to be a superb alternative to sending kids to Christian colleges. At Xenos, we have been very disappointed with the fruit born at Christian colleges, where students constantly surrounded with Christians seem to begin viewing Christianity as "Ho-hum." These students commonly come back spouting doctrinal trivia but with no idea how to witness or relate to the real world. But we also notice that kids sent to secular universities without the support of a strong Christian community usually lose their spiritual vigor or worse. With ministry houses, kids get close-in support and real community, strong enough to counteract the powerful draw of our culture. At the same time, they foray out into the secular world every day where they have to fight for their faith, and that leads to strength and realism in their walk.

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3. No Designated Giving - Most churches permit members to make special gifts to particular expenses in the church. At Xenos that's not allowed. If people want to make a donation to Xenos, they give their money to the general fund only. Our reason? We have observed that wealthy donors often attempt to influence the direction of the church through designated giving. In this way, the wealthy may end up having more influence than the poor, and according to James 2 that would be partiality. In the book of Acts, we see the believers laying their gifts at the feet of the apostles. In other words, those who are trusted with spiritual leadership should also direct the finances of the church.

At Xenos, our financial decisions are made by the elders and by the Fiscal Support Team (FST). The FST is a group of over 1200 serious donors who meet once a year for a weekend. There they go over the whole financial picture for every area of

ministry and make decisions about fiscal priorities. We think it would be wrong for people to overthrow the authority of the FST and the elders through designated giving.

On several occasions wealthy members have protested this policy, even demanding that it be changed, or they would leave the church. After explaining our position, all we could say was, "Bye!" And a number of wealthy attendees have made good on their threat, which we were sorry to see, because we could have used their powerful financial help.

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4. Elders Limited in Income and Assets - Some of the elders at Xenos work full-time for the church, and others don't. But they have all agreed to limit their incomes and assets, whether from the church or from other sources, including spouses' incomes. Our reason? First, we believe that materialistic avarice is the curse of American society, including often the American church. As elders, we want to set an example for the church that says we can live at the need level, not at the greed level. The level to which elders' incomes are limited is very comfortable (over \$80K at time of writing, actual salary for top elders, or senior pastors, is around \$50K plus a housing allowance around 15K) so this is hardly a manifestation of asceticism!

Secondly, we prefer not to have affluent elders. We have always held the judgment of the wealthy in suspicion. While we have some wealthy members who seem to keep their priorities very spiritual, we recognize wealth as "a temptation and a snare." We observe that many churches are controlled by the wealthy, and are insensitive to the poor and even to students. When wealthy people get the church to commit to expensive options, the church ends up in debt and even more beholden to the wealthy. Wealthy church members often want to pay others for doing ministry they should be willing to do themselves.

Wealth can easily develop into an attraction that competes with the Lord for our attention. We want only elders who would gladly disown their wealth in order to have the opportunity to serve God. Those who refuse to divest themselves may be signaling a problem. We want our elders to have their attention focused on spiritual matters, not on the playthings of the wealthy.

Not only elders' incomes, but also their assets come under scrutiny. In American culture, it is not unusual for adults to receive an inheritance from a wealthy relative that could unbalance their lives. A man or woman who hardly thought about money before, may become fascinated by money after receiving a million-dollar inheritance. Therefore, we call on elders to disclose their assets, and if they are excessive (beyond a home and some modest savings or retirement), we call on them to divest themselves of the excess. Although we feel our policy on this matter is somewhat soft, we think it is in general harmony with 2 Tim. 2:3,4, where Paul urges Timothy, "Suffer hardship with me, as a good soldier of Christ Jesus. No soldier in active service entangles himself in the affairs of everyday life, so that he may please the one who enlisted him as a soldier." The elders' limited income and assets have served to dissuade would-be elders from joining the board on more than one occasion in the past.

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5. No Worship Services - Visitors to Xenos are always amazed (and often appalled) that we don't conduct worship services. This often leads to the commonly heard question, "Why doesn't Xenos worship?" Xenos leaders are never happy to hear this question, since it signals a misunderstanding. We certainly do worship the Lord! The problem is that the modern Western church has a very specific understanding of what worship is, and visitors are not finding that particular form of worship at Xenos.

Xenos leaders are not convinced that the New Testament supports our modern concept of the "worship service." The early church had large meetings as well as home church meetings (Acts 2, 22). However, as we have studied these and related

passages, we do not believe these large meetings were for the purpose of corporate worship, at least not as we see it today, with music, choirs, liturgy, etc. The descriptions of these large meetings never mention worship as their goal. Instead, they appear to be meetings for teaching and evangelism. Some forms of worship, including hymns, revelations, and tongues, were practiced at the home group meetings, according to 1 Cor. 14:26. This suggests to us that home groups are the best place for group worship in song. At a deeper level, we believe that the modern church's idea of a worship service is based on the Old Testament concept of temple service, and in this sense is misleading. We believe the New Testament teaches that worship is something we do all the time, through at least 5 different modalities, of which singing is only one. Others specifically mentioned in the New Testament using worship terminology are

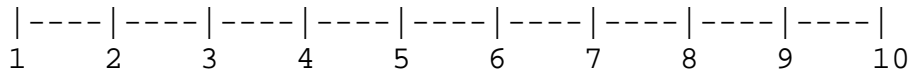
- Financial giving (Heb. 13:16; Phil. 4:18)
- Evangelism (Rom. 15:15,16)
- Works of service (Heb. 13:16)
- Praise through prayer (Heb. 13:15)
- Devoting your whole life to Christ (Rom. 12:1)

Xenos charges home churches with the mission of corporate worship. Our large meetings are for teaching and for outreach to non-Christians. Some home churches worship in song, and some just worship in prayer. The approach is up to each group.

Our unusual approach to this issue has had an interesting and unintended result. Christian visitors from other churches come to Xenos and are often dismayed to learn that the worship services they are used to are not available in our church. As a result many of these visitors leave Xenos for a church more in line with their expectations. Over the years, Xenos leaders have become resigned to this pattern, because we feel called to reach those who don't like going to church anyway. As those who long for a church worship service move on, they open up space for those in our field of outreach who are delighted that they don't have to sing Christian songs at our big meetings. Over the years, this filter has caused Xenos to have an extraordinarily "un-churchy" feel, according to most visitors.

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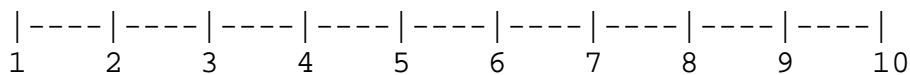
How do you support your answer?

6. Home group leaders handle all weddings, visitations, and funerals - In most churches, the staff handles functions such as these. In order to marry members, home church leaders have to be ordained by the church, and this is something most churches are reluctant to do. Churches don't want to proliferate ordained pastors who may not be well qualified. This, of course, leads to the conclusion mentioned earlier, that we must hold higher qualifications for our home church leaders.

At Xenos, we not only allow home church leaders to carry out these functions with their members, we require it. If a couple approached one of the senior elders and asked to be married, we would point out that they need to ask their home church leaders to marry them. In a church where scores of marriages may occur every year, our top leaders would be unable to do much besides marry people every weekend if not for this policy. Visitation of the sick would require even more hours for the pastoral staff. But at Xenos, sick people are visited and counseled by people in their home churches. When visiting pastors ask how we find the time to disciple new leaders, write, study, travel, teach classes, etc., we point out that half the hours normal pastors would spend in basic pastoral functions are covered by our home group leaders, enabling us to focus more time on discipleship and equipping. Our elders consider this oddity one of the really important features of Xenos, opening the door to lay ministry in a number of ways.

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7. All staff and eldership required to be in a home group - This is certainly not unique, but in our experience, it is relatively unusual. Particularly important to us is

that our top leadership is fully involved, and actually lead regular home churches. When consulting with churches interested in building their home group networks, we often find that the senior pastor and others aren't in a home group for a variety of reasons, and have no intention of joining one. We find it unlikely that such churches will succeed in building high-caliber home-based body life. For one thing, if the top leadership isn't onboard with the home fellowship agenda, how likely is it that the church will see this as a central issue? People will also quickly draw the conclusion that community of this kind must not be essential for spiritual health, because what's good for the goose, is apparently not good for the gander.

We think it is important that those on staff for pastoral counseling be leaders of home groups. This is because we have noticed a tendency in those involved in healing ministries to discount the importance of mission and leadership unless they are themselves vitally involved as leaders. Finally, top leaders who aren't weekly involved in personal discipleship and motivating a home group will not be drawing their illustrations and lessons from that experience set. We want our leaders to regularly be relating what they are learning in their groups when teaching and speaking.

We also believe that the realities of group leadership and personal discipleship often bring to light the truth about Christian leaders' lives. We have seen repeatedly that when a Christian leader begins to develop a personal spiritual problem, it comes to light first in that person's home group. Likewise, leaders who are drifting into negative territory spiritually are usually the first to begin to downplay the importance of home fellowship ministry, discipleship, and personal evangelism. Large group preaching can be ego enhancing, but personal discipleship is quiet and obscure background work. That's another reason we consider effective discipleship to be a prerequisite to public ministry. Finally, we want our paid staff to live the same struggle the rest of our leaders do: balancing career, family, and volunteer ministry.

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How do you support your answer?

8. Home group leaders handle all church discipline - Xenos home churches are like real churches. They carry out all the ministries a normal church would, including all the normal leadership functions. The only difference is that these leaders work under the oversight of our board of elders. Therefore, pastoral problems including those requiring discipline normally come up in the home church. We believe it falls to these groups to initiate discipline along the lines of Mat. 18. If a case reaches the extreme of exclusion from fellowship, the home church leaders are expected to recommend such action to the elders. The elders and oversight staff will review the case, and must agree with the discipline proposed in advance, but the home church leaders will carry out the discipline.

Normally, if the first several attempts to bring change have failed, a meeting is scheduled for committed members of the home group where the errant member can be confronted and admonished by the church. Group members have to be counseled and prepared for an experience so foreign to modern individualistic society. Leaders have to chair the meeting, making sure the tone is loving but firm. They have to make sure that Xenos policy is followed. All of these functions require considerable maturity and good judgment on the part of home group leaders. No wonder most churches won't delegate this sensitive area to their home group leaders, especially if their requirements for leadership are low.

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9. Staff hiring limited to members - At Xenos, we hire all our staff from within the church. We don't consider this to be a biblical mandate, and for that matter, we could hire from outside if the need was great, just as they did in Antioch when Barnabas went to get Paul (Acts 11:25ff). However, we feel we should prefer to hire within the church because of the message this conveys to the church. What will our people conclude if, every time we need a highly qualified leader, we look out to the job market rather than at our own people? Doesn't this suggest that they are qualified to lead and serve unless it's a high-level position, but in that case, we have to get a pro hired in from outside? Isn't this a tacit affirmation of the clergy-laity

distinction that has caused so much trouble in the history of the church, yet finds no legitimate basis in the Bible?

Another reason for sticking with members is that people need to know those who become their leaders. If a person comes from outside, how do the "sheep know his voice" to paraphrase Jesus' words. We find it hard to see how a community can feel confident about a person they have never known.

We know that many churches often hire from within, and some even hire most positions from within. But we feel we should hire all positions from within. If we feel some positions are so sophisticated that they require graduate degrees, why shouldn't we see to it that members have those degrees? If the church is charged with equipping the saints for the work of ministry, we believe we should not go outside the local church for ministers except in very unusual circumstances, probably involving extraordinary growth too rapid to allow internal equipping.

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10. Prioritized ethics - Visitors to Xenos Bible studies are often amazed to see a group of people standing around outside the meeting smoking cigarettes. They may also hear occasional off-color language. Our guests from other churches notice a difference between their churches and Xenos in a number of these areas, and are confused. They wonder why Xenos members seem so committed and zealous in many areas, but loose in other areas.

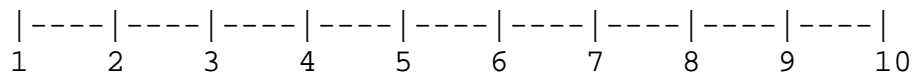
We are not proud of this distinctive in Xenos, but we do realize it grows out of our teaching on prioritized ethics. According to this approach to ethics, some areas of moral behavior are more important than others. Therefore, we should focus on the important areas rather than the unimportant. This is the opposite of the pharisaic error Jesus called "straining out the gnat and swallowing the camel."

When we study what Scripture advances as important in the field of ethics, we find that Christian serving love of God and others is paramount. This means that sins of

omission (like failing to develop good relationships, or failing to have ministry to others) would be a serious failing. But smoking cigarettes or saying a cuss word would be minor infractions. We think the traditional church pays way too much attention to minor infractions, while ignoring big sins like selfishness or materialism. We further find that we can't just say we will hold the line in all areas. The result of a purist approach (or an UN-prioritized approach) is that people begin to comply in outward visible areas but ignore the often more important areas involving omission. How sad it would be to see our people saying, "I don't cuss or smoke," and yet they fail to witness or disciple!

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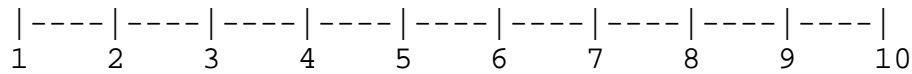
11. High level of content - Visitors at Xenos often comment on the content level of teachings. Apparently, we teach at a level considered too heavy for public meetings in most churches. Xenos leaders comment that they don't like the simplistic teaching level in some churches, and that they often have felt like they were being treated like children when in church.

We have observed an overall ignorance among the Christian public (as opposed to Christian leaders, who know plenty) that we find distasteful and want nothing to do with. The often-heard claim that the church today is too occupied with book knowledge and theology is confusing to Xenos leaders. We are aware of a handful of splinter groups where book knowledge might prevail, but the overwhelming majority of the church today seems incredibly ignorant--not only ignorant of contemporary scholarship in secular areas, but even ignorant of the Bible. We agree that even the relatively low level of Bible knowledge in some churches may exceed the level of actual practice of biblical teaching. But we don't believe that further reducing people's knowledge levels will help with their lack of action in obedience. In other words, if people are just studying the Bible but not practicing it, the solution is not to stop studying, but to start practicing. Paul was clear that our love should grow in real knowledge and all discernment (Col. 1:9,10)

We also disagree that the general public is not responsive to sophisticated reasoning. Many Christian leaders seem to feel that non-Christians will be bored if we teach too in-depth. But we find that people enjoy being challenged in their thinking, and even if they don't understand parts of what they hear, they are still attracted to people who seem to know what they are talking about.

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How do you support your answer?

12. Three-level structure instead of two - Most cell-based churches in America today have a two-level structure. The large meetings are the corporate worship meetings, and the small meetings are the cell groups. Cell groups, or small groups are usually 6 to 15 adults. Some churches have their small groups limited to believers only. Others welcome new people. But we have talked to a number of leaders who find themselves torn with this arrangement. Some pastors worry that their believer-only small groups will turn inward and lose interest in outreach. The small groups could become Bible clubs for Christians, or "holy huddles." Others worry that because their small groups are always geared toward new people, there are no meetings in the life of their church devoted to discipleship and deep learning. Churches have trouble raising up good leaders when no meetings offer deep learning and accountability.

At Xenos, we have a three-level structure. We have our big meetings like other churches, although they are not worship services. We also have home churches, which are groups of 15 to 60 adults. Home churches are open to non-Christian guests, and are really small communities. Within each home church there are typically 2 or more cell groups. Our cell groups are usually 4 to 12 men or women, but not both. The men's or women's cell groups are for believers only, and usually have a fairly aggressive study schedule. They usually share and pray for each other as well. These are groups devoted to discipleship and spiritual growth. Thus, with our three level structure, we have home group meetings devoted to outreach as well as some devoted to growth. For many groups, this means a third meeting each week. Other groups alternate the home church and the cell group meetings. We find that our three-level structure addresses all the needs in the church in a way no two-

level structure is likely to do. We have experimented with two-level approaches on several occasions, but the groups always seem to go back to three-level arrangements after a time.

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13. Unique planning approach - For many years, Xenos elders would go out of town for a week every year to plan ministry for the coming year. Half the time was spent on an assessment of where we were at, and the other half on planning. Then in the early 90's we developed a new approach to planning that has been very motivating for the church and has allowed hundreds to get involved in setting the direction for the church.

The first step begins in August. Each division in our church goes to its staff and lay leadership to ask for an assessment and proposed new goals. As these ideas are discussed and gathered together, they are sorted and screened by the division coordinators and the management team, as they build a report and proposal for each division. By this time, hundreds have already spent serious time studying and praying about the future of the ministry.

The second step is the planning retreat. The retreat is attended by the elders and the division coordinators, and occurs in middle to late September. Each division gives their report on progress to date, success or failure in reaching last year's goals, special problems or opportunities they see, etc. Then they propose new goals for each area of ministry. The proposals are debated and some are rejected as impractical or wrong-headed. The rest become the basis for the next step.

The third step involves connecting budget realities to the goals adopted in September. During the month of October the management team assigns price tags to each goal as well as already existing ministry. For instance, if accomplishing a goal means they will have to hire someone, the new salary, benefits and computer needs will be entered as a proposed budget increase. They sort their expenses out into those that are essential to their mission, those that are important, and those

which are optional. These are assembled into a budget proposal composed of 4 levels. The first level is the base budget, which is considered nonnegotiable (although in fact it is negotiable, and may be reduced further by the elders). This base budget must be at least 10% lower than the previous year's budget for a given division, in case the Fiscal Support Team want to reduce spending in that division. The other levels are optional spending and increases, which are sorted in order of importance. When the budget proposals are ready, the elders and division coordinators have another retreat in late October called the budget retreat. At this retreat, the team looks at the big picture by assembling all the proposals into a combined budget for the entire church. Normally, the numbers are too high and cuts have to be made. By the end of the week the team emerges with a finished budget proposal. The increases and optional spending are arranged into "modules" of spending in readiness for the next step.

The final step is the Fiscal Support Team Retreat. Around a thousand committed members in Xenos who are also regular givers attend this retreat. At the retreat, one of the lead elders begins by presenting an overview of the church as a whole. Then each division coordinator gives a presentation on the ministry in their division. The presentation covers why the work they do is important, how it is progressing, and why they need their spending modules passed by vote. The elders direct the coordinators to present their needs in the best possible light, and plead for funds, ignoring the other divisions' needs and the fact that some must go without. This is because we want our people to realize what it's like to be an elder overseeing limited resources and urgent ministry needs that must be sometimes rejected because of financial realities.

At the end of the presentations, the team holds two votes. First they vote on how much to expand the budget during the coming year, understanding that they will have to pay most of the bill. After adjourning for dinner, they reassemble and find out the result of the earlier vote. If the vote was to increase spending by 17%, they will be given a dollar figure, which they can spend on new spending modules. (They don't vote on the base budget because this involved commitments from earlier years, like mortgage payments and essential staff). Each member gets a large ballot listing all the modules presented during the retreat. They have to pass the modules in order of priority for each division. This means that coordinators can prevent unimportant spending when important needs have not been met. On the other hand, the team can refuse all the modules for a given division, leaving them up to 10% less than the previous year's spending.

After turning in the ballots, the team enjoys a party with food and beverage while a team tabulates the results. Later that night, the results are announced, and the team has an opportunity to turn in giving pledges for the coming year.

During the next two months, the leadership goes to the entire church both at large meetings, and at home church meetings, explaining the decisions made and the need. People are invited to make pledges for the coming year. Unless we raise

pledges for 90% of the proposed budget, the elders cut modules from the proposal in reverse order from what was voted.

During the first 6 years we used this planning approach, we have only had to cut a small amount on one occasion. People in the church understand where the money goes and they support those directions from the heart. During the 6 years we have used this approach, Xenos has gone from a church weak in giving to one that is relatively generous. Infighting over budget priorities, which used to harm the church, is now unknown.

For Discussion:

- Are you aware of any other churches that are like Xenos here?
- Do you think Xenos should change in this area?
- Do you think this difference is peripheral or central? On a scale from 1-10, rate this difference from 1 = unimportant to 10 = extremely important

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How do you support your answer?

14. Church planting is a prerequisite for high leadership roles - Selecting good leaders is always difficult, and it's important, since the quality of any church is not likely to be higher than the quality of its top leaders. We have observed that many churches come under deficient leadership at times, and we want to avoid that. To select good leaders, we begin by limiting our search to our own church. This way, we know the person we are hiring, and aren't dependent on second hand reports from other groups. We try to get people with proven character as the top requirement. Then too, we find that for top staff--those directly involved in leading large sections of the church, we want those who are successful church planters.

Planting home churches in Xenos is very difficult. Home church leaders not only have to take care of a group of 25 or more people, they have to promote evangelism, train new leaders, and provide field experience for their new leaders. They have to develop, not just a leader, but a balanced team of leaders and a following to go with the new team. All of this takes some years of work and sacrifice. If the new church plant fails, they come right back to the planting church.

We find that the challenge of home church planting is so tough that only quality leaders with a fair amount of experience are able to pull it off. In Xenos, everyone respects successful church planters as those who know what they are talking about when it comes to ministry. That's why we select successful planters as home church

consultants, course teachers, elders, and other high-profile roles. It's great to be able to pick from those who have repeatedly accomplished a task we are all familiar with. We don't have to wonder how good such leaders are!

One exception to this rule of thumb are leaders who have served in youth ministry. We have many of our best leaders serving as high school or Jr. Hi workers, and these often don't engage in home church planting as such. Yet if they are producing disciples of high quality, they would be respected and hired just as readily as church planters.

For Discussion:

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- Do you think Xenos should change in this area?
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How do you support your answer?

15. Extraordinary Emphasis on Classes - If you visited the Xenos campus on a Wed. night, you would see 500 to 800 people milling around going to classes. That's over 3000 registrations per year! This goes on four quarters each year. A typical quarter's offering will include a dozen classes ranging from basic introductory classes to graduate level classes. We have not seen a class system similar to ours in any other church, although our knowledge is far from exhaustive. We do see churches offering courses, but never at the same level of involvement relative to their church. Most churches would be delighted if 10% of their people took a class each year. We commonly see most of our people take a class, and many take several. We have seen churches operate mini-seminaries for those who are planning to leave the church as missionaries or church planters, but this seems different.

The students have to pay a small tuition for each classes, amounting to about \$5 per week of class (students get a discount). People of all ages come out for these classes. The rest of the cost for the classes is funded from our general fund.

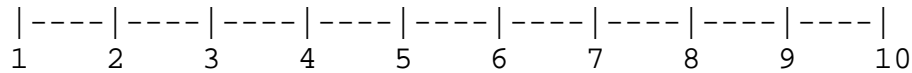
Also, our classes are more difficult than other churches we have visited. The typical class meets for 3-hour sessions once a week. They are either 5 or 10 weeks long, and they include homework and graded tests or research projects. We don't hesitate to flunk any student who doesn't do the work.

People at Xenos love taking classes. People commonly take classes that are not required for any role just for the pleasure of learning. Our classes are viewed as a ministry of the Word that meets people's needs in private life and in ministry. The typical Christian at Xenos sees him or herself moving toward leadership ministry roles, so classes are beneficial in developing the competency needed for such roles.

Xenos spends around 20% of its annual budget staffing and operating classes.

For Discussion:

- Are you aware of any other churches that are like Xenos here?
- Do you think Xenos should change in this area?
- Do you think this difference is peripheral or central? On a scale from 1-10, rate this difference from 1 = unimportant to 10 = extremely important



How do you support your answer?

16. Urban community development ministry uniquely emphasized - Xenos is very heavily committed to Christian Community Development. We have not found other churches with a ministry analogous to our Urban Concern.

Urban concern is a \$1.3 million a year effort to reach a one square-mile area of the inner city in Columbus, and to eventually transform that neighborhood through the love of Christ. The strategy is to focus on children, and stay with them over a 10 to 20 year period, helping their families bring them up in the nurture of the Lord. They will hopefully become leaders who will stay in the neighborhood and take over the process of transformation as indigenous leaders. Over 20 full-time staff and hundreds of volunteers work in this ministry which operates an after school program, an inner-city school, job training programs, Bible studies, and church planting.

Most of the top staff for Urban Concern have actually moved into the inner city to live among the disadvantaged people they serve. Xenos funds the ministry to the tune of around \$500,000, and they raise the rest from government and community donations.

Xenos is mainly an underground church planting movement, but we believe the Bible also charges those with money to care for the poor. We believe that any middle class church that is not actively seeking to share with those who

disadvantaged is not fully living out the New Testament picture of the church. Not only do we believe we should care for the poor, but we also should invest in long-term change, not just handouts and short term relief.

For Discussion:

- Are you aware of any other churches that are like Xenos here?
- Do you think Xenos should change in this area?
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How do you support your answer?

17. Entire teams formed, funded, and sent to foreign fields - According to missions experts like Tom Telford, Xenos' practice in the field of foreign missions is also very unusual. In our experience, most churches send missionaries from their own church either through their denomination, or through a variety of missions agencies. These agencies are usually chosen by the missionaries, based on their own criteria. The church will frequently have some contact with the agency, but most communication with the field is through the missionaries. Many independent churches will find themselves involved with several different agencies, and large churches may work through eight, twelve, or more.

Xenos faced questions about how we wanted to do missions during the 80's. We had been growing at a rate so rapid that it prevented us from sending missionaries earlier, in spite of a heartfelt desire to do our part in other cultures. Therefore, when our leadership sat to consider where we were going to go in world missions, we had the opportunity to write on a blank chalkboard rather than one cluttered with existing alliances and commitments.

The Xenos leaders decided we wanted direct involvement with our missionaries and their ministries. We didn't want to simply have our people feel called to different fields and agencies and expect the church to give its blessing and support. We realized that Xenos had it's own ministry ethos and emphases that were quite different from other churches. Xenos is very non-traditional and eager to avoid exporting a western-style church to new people groups where those forms would become a nuisance. We felt a strong desire to keep our missionaries working together in teams on the field like they were used to doing in this country.

We also wished we could find a mission agency that understood and appreciated our approach to ministry and our theological distinctives. Such an agency might be willing to place our people together in teams, perhaps with missionaries from other churches who feel compatible with our approach. Also, we felt that if we were willing to commit a good number of people to the field, an agency might be willing to include us in a partnering agreement, and share key decision-making responsibility with us.

We set out to establish a partnership, first studying and interviewing several different agencies. We finally found a good level of compatibility with World Team. Two of their top leaders came and spent several days at Xenos, observing our meetings and talking to our leaders. They were excited about our approach to equipping and home group planting, which they felt was similar to strategies they were using on other fields. We decided to hold talks on a new kind of church-agency partnership agreement.

After months of give and take, we approved the final draft of our agreement. It included provisions for decision making on

- who would go to what field, including screening procedures
- field selection and research
- missionary training and preparation
- how teams would be composed and led
- field supervision
- financial responsibility and budget planning
- visitation
- home assignment arrangements

Xenos World Ministries and World Team have worked together under this agreement, with modifications from time to time, for the past 8 years. Xenos leaders strongly urge those in our church who feel called to missions to consider going as a Xenos-World Team missionary. To date, we have accredited and sent nearly 40 career missionaries to 6 different fields under this agreement. Xenos also has missionaries working under other agencies now, and in the past. But as our experience has accumulated, we see more and more benefit to the World Team/Xenos partnership.

Some of the key benefits we see are:

- The leaders at Xenos and those at World Team have built rewarding personal relationships over these years. If we had been working with half a dozen agencies, we never would have been able to spend time and energy at the same level. The friendships we enjoy at the leadership level have been very beneficial at times of need or crisis on the field. Nothing serves better when resolving misunderstandings than trusting relationships.

- The loyalty the two groups have shown each other has opened doors for cooperation on other projects. World team leaders regularly help Xenos with their missions classes and events. Xenos leaders have consulted for World Team leaders' churches and policy meetings. The agency and the church regularly work together on missionary assessment, field research, and other areas.

- Xenos leaders have a visitation program for supporting our field operatives, and World Team visits the same missionaries for regular reporting and oversight. This is very typical of course, but with the partnership, there's a difference. Xenos and World Team leaders see themselves working together both in pastoral issues and field strategy. Therefore, the issues one group of leaders sees when on the field or interacting via email are regularly shared with the other. Nothing is more helpful than a well-informed "heads up" when visiting people we haven't seen for some time. Likewise, Xenos leaders have been able to serve as intermediaries at times between our field teams and World Team. Overall communication has been enhanced.

- Initiative to open new ministries can come either from World Team or from Xenos leaders. Xenos enjoys extensive access to expertise from World Team in our planning. World Team enjoys a ready supply of eager, well-trained operatives from Xenos along with 80% their financial support.

- Xenos and World Team are developing new approaches to training for missionaries. Instead of relying only on the traditional degree from a seminary, we now urge prospective missionaries to spend one or more years engaged in urban house church planting under the supervision of experienced leaders at Xenos. This field experience runs in parallel with a Bible/missiology/ministry course series suited to the kind of work missionaries can expect to do on the field. The new training approach will be compatible with more traditional training approaches.

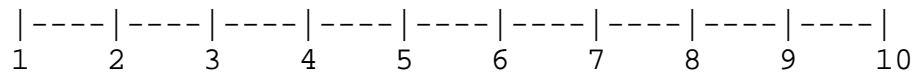
- Because of our partnership, we at Xenos are convinced that World Team leaders understand our wide-ranging problems and concerns in a way no other

agency would be able. Likewise, World Team is able to request help from Xenos for specific needs in various fields.

Partnership has been the spirit desired by missions agencies for many years. Yet, for some reason, churches and agencies have not formed specific partnership agreements very often that we are aware of. Lately, large churches are increasingly interested in these kind of agreements.

For Discussion:

- Are you aware of any other churches that are like Xenos here?
- Do you think Xenos should change in this area?
- Do you think this difference is peripheral or central? On a scale from 1-10, rate this difference from 1 = unimportant to 10 = extremely important



How do you support your answer?

18. Leadership Teams for Most Home Groups - In the New Testament, eldership is always plural. The accountability of collective leadership is an important control that we believe was intended by God because of the fundamental untrustworthiness of human nature. By entrusting the local church to a group of leaders, the likelihood that one person will go bad or be misled and destroy the church is reduced. Satan's task is made more difficult—he must not only mislead and tempt an individual, but also must win over a whole group of leaders to his ends. We believe the church would have done much better if it had stayed with plurality of leadership throughout its history.

We know churches in the New Testament were organized with group elderships in each city. But we also know that there were often multiple home churches within a given city. How were the eldership teams related to the house churches in that city? Of this, we know little or nothing. Therefore, we conclude we are free to improvise in this area, as long as our structures result in the outworking of key principles of church life.

In addition to eldership, New Testament churches had deacons, which means ministers, or servants. Nobody knows exactly what these ministers did, but judging from their qualifications, they were trusted servants of the church at a high level. While churches debate whether elders could include females, we think it is very clear that deacons could be male or female.

In Xenos, we have a board of 8 elders overseeing the network of house churches, but our home churches are led by deacons. We don't believe the Bible calls for plurality of deacons when they lead groups, but we often prefer plurality, not only for elders but also for deacons, especially if they are going to lead a sizable group. Here are a number of practical and theological considerations regarding plural leadership:

- A plurality of untrained, ignorant, and immature leaders is no more reliable than a single leader. Only if the leaders on a team are all trained and mature Christian workers can we assume that a group will be more reliable than an individual.
- We don't consider a husband and wife to be a true plurality. Couples tend to "think together" and need an outside perspective. Besides, disagreement in leadership could contradict roles in the marriage.
- We usually require three singles, or a couple and a single as minimum for plurality. But most of our home churches are led by a team of four or five leaders.
- We used to view our leaders as coequal within a team. Now we prefer to have a senior leader. Having a senior leader allows some insignificant decision to be made without a meeting, which is easier for everyone. Also, recognizing a senior leader authorizes that person to take initiative in leading the group, and in leading the leadership team. This counters the paralysis that may result from "leadership by committee." However, a majority of the team can overrule a senior leader, so accountability is preserved.
- Group size is the most important factor to consider when deciding whether to require plurality of leadership. To require plurality with even very small groups would unreasonably retard their ability to multiply. Also, the ratio of leaders to members would be unnecessarily low if small groups had to have plural leadership. Since most of our groups are house churches, with attendance between 15 and 60, we require true plurality in each one. An individual or a couple, on the other hand, may lead our smaller groups.
- Medium sized groups, like home churches, are large enough to have an identity as a group or a community, and may develop loyalty to their own home church, more than to the larger church. On the positive side, this makes home churches very hardy—nearly indestructible. On the other hand, many churches are reluctant to establish medium sized groups because of their history of divisiveness. We think plurality of leadership is the answer to this negative tendency found in some medium-sized groups. While plural leadership may decide to divide from the rest of the church, it seems much less likely that an entire well-trained team would decide to take this unrighteous direction. During over 30 years of ministry, Xenos has experienced very little divisiveness from

home churches. On the other hand, sometimes churches' efforts to prevent division cause more harm than division itself. We would rather have one or two home churches leave if they want to than have all our groups suffer based on the fear of division.

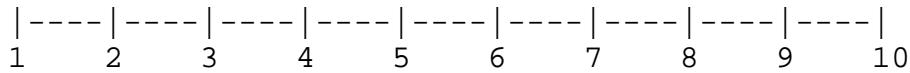
- The size of the group suggests that teaching is more appropriate than mere sharing. Many churches worry this could lead to doctrinal aberrations. Again, plural leadership and good training is the best safeguard against doctrinal error. We find very suspicious the thought (sometimes openly expressed by pastors) that to prevent doctrinal error we should keep leaders ignorant and teach groups not to study the Bible together.
- Requiring plurality of leadership in home groups significantly slows the rate of group duplication. Again and again, Xenos home churches have reached maximum attendance without having plural leadership ready for both sides of a proposed church plant. Leaders in this situation will feel a strong temptation to cheat—either going to a larger venue than a house, or planting without plurality. But we believe that God can use such a situation to stress balance in the ministry of a given group. The group may be stressing evangelism, but not equipping and growth. If continued, such a trend would lead to a very shallow group indeed. If the group relieves pressure on itself by going to a larger venue, they may lose their incentive to raise up leaders as well as their ability to go back into homes. We prefer to let the pressure of being full serve to emphasize the need to finish the job of raising up qualified leaders. We think God uses this to promote what is lacking in a group. Thus by using an underground approach, we believe the church will be regulated between overemphasizing evangelism or training. The quandary of reduced growth for the sake of plurality also raises important questions for the central leadership of the church. Are we willing to temporarily forfeit numeric growth for the sake of quality in the church?
- Another potential negative for leadership teams is disagreement within the leadership team. Corporate leadership requires a willingness to accept limitations on autonomy and decision making that the immature find irksome if not unacceptable. Leaders must develop skills of negotiation and patient communication in order to form a successful team. Certain self-willed and dominating individuals are weeded out by their inability to function as team players, and this is all to the good. Any individual who is too self-willed to work with colleagues on a team is not welcome to lead in our church.
- In Xenos, home church leaders are not empowered to remove other home church leaders from leadership. Only the elders can remove a home church leader. This prevents a majority from overrunning a minority in a team without outside confirmation. Sometimes, the lone dissenting leader is in the right!
- Whether to require plurality is determined not only by the size of a group, but by the scope of ministry delegated to home group leaders. Since so many

pastoral issues involve sensitive judgment calls, elders may find themselves wondering whether to trust the judgment of single leaders at times. But when a team of trained leaders concur in a judgment call, we have a good basis for trusting their view. Perhaps lack of plurality accounts for why many churches are reluctant to delegate important areas of ministry (like church discipline, or counseling) to home group leaders.

- Not only the elders' minds are eased by plurality, but home church leaders find their own minds eased by the opportunity to bounce ministry questions off other leaders who are actually involved in their ministry with them. A lot of potential leaders are more willing to consider being part of a leadership team who would not feel comfortable taking on leadership by themselves.
- Spouses who are not inclined to be leaders, either by gifting or temperament, find themselves willing to join in a leadership team with one or two other couples. We believe having couples lead together is healthy for marriages, and we strongly resist people leading without their spouses.

For Discussion:

- Are you aware of any other churches that are like Xenos here?
- Do you think Xenos should change in this area?
- Do you think this difference is peripheral or central? On a scale from 1-10, rate this difference from 1 = unimportant to 10 = extremely important



How do you support your answer?

19. Generate all our own children's curriculum - We know we aren't the only ones to do this, but we do see it as unusual. The main reason was that our leadership couldn't find curriculum that wasn't "churchy." Xenos is a very non-churchy church, and we didn't want our kids subjected to a traditional church perspective.

Another complaint was that much of the children's curriculum was too simplistic, and didn't really teach the Bible. Our assessment was that kids were feeling patronized by over simplified material that wasn't really challenging them.

Finally, a lot of curriculum is legalistic. The focus seems to often be on good behavior, seeming to stress that being a good kid is what Christianity is all about. Our people were so frustrated that they decided to write their own curriculum from

preschool to 5th grade. The project has taken over 5 years for a team of writers, all working at their own expense. Now we give the curriculum away for free to many churches. Come to think of it, the high price of children's curriculum is another gripe we had!

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How do you support your answer?

20. Over 50% of attendees involved in discipleship pairing - Xenos is an underground indigenous church planting movement. Our approach to ministry assumes that qualified leaders are rising up in our midst constantly. We have to generate over 50 leaders a year just to keep up, and that number continues to rise. When you consider how high our standards are for leadership, you realize this isn't an easy task. But we continue to succeed because we don't depend on the staff to accomplish our leadership development. Instead, every mature Christen in the church sees it as his or her job to help raise up new leaders.

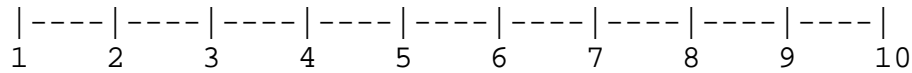
Today, nearly 1000 adults and students at Xenos have someone they are discipling in private meetings (and many have several). This is in addition to our home churches, cell groups, and classes. We find that these one-on-one times are good for building friendships, and that many issues of application and personal character development only come out in these meetings. Also, nothing is better than a one-on-one meeting for coaching in ministry development.

We are careful to avoid any definition of discipleship that implies the discipler has control over the disciple, like in the so-called "Shepherding Movement." We teach our people that discipling is a facilitating and helping role, not a controlling role. We are optimistic today that leaders will be ready when needed tomorrow because over 2000 of our people are actively engaged in personal discipleship.

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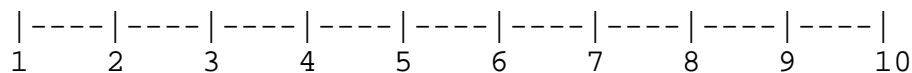
How do you support your answer?

21. Extraordinarily high percentage of youth groups are non-Xenos kids - We are excited to see that our Junior High ministry is 40% non-Xenos kids (that is, their parents don't go to church here) and our High School ministry is nearly 60% non-Xenos kids. Our college ministry is over 70% non-Xenos kids. Based on our visits to other churches and youth groups, we find that the overwhelming majority of most churches' youth groups are kids from the church. We think this is a sign of health, and bodes well for the future of Xenos.

All together our student groups from Jr. High through College among to over 700 students. Our student groups focus on outreach to secular friends at school and work, and our meetings are all non-churchy. Xenos leaders put very heavy emphasis on student ministry, because we believe these people will be our leaders soon. By the time students reach the college group, they begin planting their own home churches and the pattern of ministry shifts from a staff and program based approach to a self-replicating church-planting approach. By the time these students graduate, they are in their own home churches and intent on continuing to plant new home churches all over the city.

For Discussion:

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How do you support your answer?

22. No scripted ministry approach for lay leaders - Most churches we have studied provide a curriculum or lesson plan for their home groups. These may be based on the sermon that week, or may be nationally published small group curriculum like Serendipity, Touch, or similar. We have looked at these options and experimented with some, but in the end prefer not to use any.

Our leaders are equipped to develop their own lessons, mainly based on expository study of the Bible. By far the majority of our groups are engaged in expository Bible study of a New or Old Testament book at any one time. In addition, groups occasionally do topical series on subjects of interest, like marriage, finance, social ethics, or theological topics. Our study center provides all the materials leaders need to do personal research, and groups also leave copies of series they have developed at the center for other groups to use. In recent years, our leaders have also benefited greatly from our extensive web site.

We find that leaders who base their groups on prepared curriculum lose interest in teaching. The curriculum is often oversimplified, and seems to do too much for the teacher. Teaching people the ways of God becomes something anyone can do, and loses its challenge. People who are doing sophisticated work in their careers may come to lead their Bible study group and find themselves doing childishly simple work. No wonder they lose interest!

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How do you support your answer?

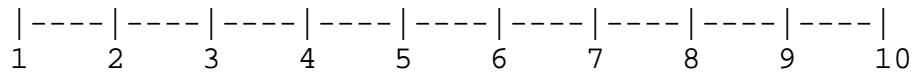
23. Secular music at student ministry meetings - So far, we have never seen another church that plays mostly, or all, secular music at their student meetings. But at Xenos, current secular music is the norm. Our students come from different parts of town, and different cultural groups, so one might hear rap, punk, indi-rock, or blues, but only rarely do we hear Christian titles. The reason? Partly, this ties in with our view of worship as not depending on singing. Because we don't feel that Christian songs are necessary for worship, the question becomes what people want to play or hear. We find our people don't like Christian music. In fairness, most of them are probably relatively unaware of much of contemporary Christian music. But the exposure they have had has not impressed most of them. Since the leadership doesn't legislate what music to play, they end up playing secular music.

Most of our students feel that their secular friends will find secular music attractive, so it does play the role of cultural identification with our near-neighbors. We ask performers to avoid really extreme secular music that has obscene or satanic words.

But patently false views are presented in song, often with commentary about how this is the way some people look at things, but look where it leads, etc. Many of our adult meetings also have secular music, but some Christian music is included in these meetings.

For Discussion:

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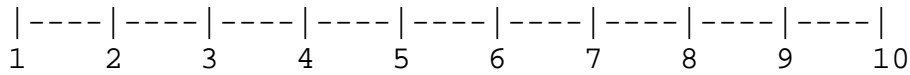
How do you support your answer?

24. Students do expository Scripture teachings to large and small meetings -
Our visits to other churches reveal that students are called on to speak at their student meetings, but nearly always to give a personal testimony, tell a story, or discuss a topic. So far, we have never seen a student speaker in another church give an expository Bible teaching. Adults, yes, but never students. Actually, most youth groups don't have expository teaching even from adults.

We find this curious, especially in churches that believe in frequent expository teaching. Why not teach students how to interpret and present a passage of Scripture to their peers? Some churches believe such an approach would be too boring. But we don't find it's boring unless the students have had inadequate training. Nothing is more exciting than a well-exposed passage of scripture! Students study hermeneutics, homiletics, and discussion leading in class. They also usually go over, and even give the teaching to a mentor who can correct any shortcomings. We think our approach has some benefits--students learn their Bible better when they teach it, and they gain experience teaching and preaching. Later, when they take over their own groups, they will already have significant experience speaking in front of groups.

For Discussion:

- Are you aware of any other churches that are like Xenos here?
- Do you think Xenos should change in this area?
- Do you think this difference is peripheral or central? On a scale from 1-10, rate this difference from 1 = unimportant to 10 = extremely important



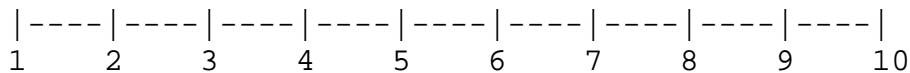
How do you support your answer?

25. Home support teams for missions - Each Xenos mission team also has a home support team. We organize the home support team as a ministry team like any other. The leader has to be a servant team member. Other participants usually include the prayer and support team for all the missionaries on the team. They regularly meet for prayer and news about the ministry. They also assist the team by helping with their newsletters or stories in the Xenos Exchange.

Missions expert Tom Telford says Xenos is the only church he knows of that has such missions teams. He felt it was a good idea, because it served to entwine missions into the fabric and strategy of the church as a whole. Our missionaries love it! They have work to focus on where they are, and they can still do a good job raising awareness in Columbus by giving their info to their support team and letting them take it from there. On some occasions, the teams raise money for special projects or gather clothes or other wish list items for the field.

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How do you support your answer?

26. Youngest large church in America? - According to one large church authority, Xenos is easily the youngest church in its size range of several thousand attending. We don't know whether this is true or not, but we do notice that we are on the young side, compared to other large churches. This partly results, not from the presence of young people in the church, but from the absence of older people. Although the original membership of the group is aging and now is middle aged,

the average age in the church has recently declined by several years. The reasons for this are:

1. The tremendous push the church has made to expand student ministries. Our spending, staffing, and volunteer commitment to student ministry has soared during the 90's.
2. We lost over a thousand people during a large church division several years ago, mostly middle-aged. This means the ranks of students in the church are now several times what they were a decade ago and the middle-aged ranks have been thinned badly.
3. Xenos' approach to worship may be more appealing to younger people than to middle-aged and seniors. The music we play at outreach meetings too non-traditional for most seniors.

We have three home churches made up of seniors, but the numbers are quite small relative to the rest of the church. Xenos doesn't set any goals to keep our average age young, and in fact many feel we would benefit from having more seniors in the church. It's just one of those unusual things about our church.

For Discussion:

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How do you support your answer?

27. No formal membership - This certainly is not unique, but it is somewhat unusual, especially for large churches. Our refusal to establish a formal membership is the result of our theological understanding of church membership, and our efforts to emulate the early church. Our definition of the church is spiritual (i.e. all true believers are part of the body of Christ whether they attend meetings or not) and therefore we feel it would be impossible for humans to accurately know who is a member and who is not. We believe efforts to establish membership can result in an institutional definition of the church rather than an organic or spiritual

definition. Some that we define as members would be truly non-members, while others who we deny are members would in fact be members.

We see this distinctive as a good thing, but at the same time, a minor thing. We don't feel strongly critical of churches that have formal memberships, and in fact, it would be difficult to say how much actual impact this feature has had on Xenos' development. Our leadership feels that refusing to define membership contributes to a proper view of the spiritual nature of the church. We tell people that we let God keep our membership rolls for us.

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How do you support your answer?

28. Most top leadership involved in youth ministry - In all the churches we have visited, youth ministry is an entry-level position on church staffs. Church leaders often begin their careers as youth workers, but later move up to adult ministry. We have not seen any large church where the senior pastor sees his main ministry as students.

At Xenos we are "crashing the boards" for student ministry. After beginning as a student group in the 70's, Xenos gradually aged and lost its stake in student ministry during the 80's. But by s1990, our high school and college-aged membership numbered fewer than 100 students! At that point, our elders declared student ministry the number one priority for the church. For the next 6 years student ministry remained the number one priority, as we scrambled to avoid being cut off from the source of youth and the vigor that comes with young leadership. Every year, student ministries had whatever they wanted in terms of funding, personnel, and facilities. Under the leadership of Joe Botti the student ministries division proceeded to recruit nearly all the top leaders in our church to serve in student outreach and discipleship. All but two of our 8 elders, including both senior elders, see student ministry as their main commitment. Most of our top staffers also work in student ministry as volunteers. Xenos has built a nice youth facility for high school students called Building X that has a capacity of over 1000. We also

lease a fantastic venue for meetings on campus at Ohio State University which will be renovated this year to accommodate 400 per meeting.

Xenos student strategy moves from a program-driven approach in Middle School and High School to a cell-driven, self-replicating indigenous house church strategy in the College group. The program-driven portion today involves well over 100 adult volunteers and over 20 full and part time staff. At the same time, college home churches have multiplied during the past 4 years from 3 to 12 groups.

Today, our student ministries have not only flourished but remain the fastest growing part of the church. Including Blow Out, North Central Fellowship, and Campus Bible Study groups, our students now number over 700 and are poised for fantastic growth during the next few years. This is because we not only have the leadership and training structure in place, but adult Xenos members' own kids are now beginning to enter this age group (middle school) in huge numbers! Entering classes are now over 60 sixth graders per year, and history indicates these kids will reach more than twice their own number in the next few years. Considering there are 10 classes involved in this part of our ministry, we are planning to have over 2000 students a few years from now.

Meanwhile, the rest of the church is already feeling the impact of the victory in student ministry. Several home churches have been planted from the student ranks into the post-college ranks, and these are some of our most vigorous adult home churches. At other times, individuals have transferred from the student groups to existing adult groups, bringing a welcome infusion of youth and excitement into these groups.

For Discussion:

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How do you support your answer?

29. Most ministry teams initiated by individuals, not staff - Churches today commonly operate ministry teams to accomplish specific tasks. These are usually organized and led by members of the church staff, but not at Xenos. Xenos had developed a unique process for people who want to initiate ministry teams. Using this system, anyone who wants to see a ministry started can approach the leadership

for accreditation. Accreditation is not permission! We don't believe anyone needs our permission to start a ministry. Instead, accreditation is a statement of agreement that the ministry is credible, needed and a priority for the church at this time. Accredited ministry teams have privileges in the church including enhanced publicity helps, funding, facilities and access to staff.

Scores of teams have been accredited using this system. The teams are assessed annually or biannually, and may lose accreditation if conditions change. Nevertheless, teams that lose accreditation still can carry out their ministry and reapply for accreditation again in the future.

For Discussion:

- Are you aware of any other churches that are like Xenos here?
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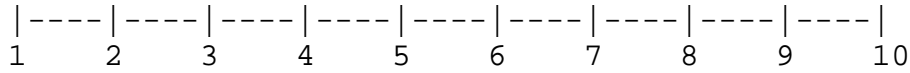
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How do you support your answer?

30. Two senior leaders instead of one - Xenos has two lead pastors, Dennis McCallum and Gary DeLashmutt.

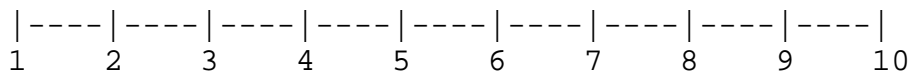
We consider this distinctive to be an unimportant and peripheral feature, by no means mandated in Scripture. In fact, both Dennis and Gary have stated that they would not recommend this arrangement for most churches. The arrangement at Xenos is based on the unique history of these two men who have worked as partners for 30 years, after knowing each other since kindergarten! They were not only partners in ministry, but also co-owned a business for years before Xenos put them on staff.

Their partnership has been mutually beneficial, as they believe their personalities are complementary. But they believe it would be both difficult and pointless to try to duplicate such a partnership in most cases, and if one of them were to die or leave, almost certainly no effort would be made to replace the lost partner in a coequal role. Usually coequal partnerships become a deadlock and a liability, but in our case it seems to work out well.

Today, the two men (like most staffers at Xenos, where office sharing is encouraged) work every day in the same office, with their desks adjoining. They meet for breakfast, sharing, and occasional prayer on Tuesday mornings at McDonalds as they have for 25 years.

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How do you support your answer?

31. Question and Comment time at main meetings - Visitors are amazed when our main "service" ends and the pastor asks if there are comments or questions. People hold up their hands and ushers bring them cordless microphones. The teacher points to people who ask questions or make a point.

This part of our Central Teachings is very popular, especially with new people. Of course, we have no way of knowing what people will say. Some guests may use this time to express outrage or disagreement with what was said. When this happens the speaker gives a rejoinder and we move on. Once in awhile, a mentally disturbed person may show up and share something really crazy! Our teachers ask them to sit down and offer some appropriate response.

Usually, the questions or points are really good. It gives the church an opportunity to correct imbalances in the teaching, or to clarify points that were unclear or misleading. We love it! We have always wondered why more churches don't have this feature.

For Discussion:

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How do you support your answer?

32. Strange name - People are always asking about the name, "Xenos Christian Fellowship." Some of our members regret this name, because it can cause suspicion, like anything unusual. The name actually makes sense--Xenos is the Greek word for alien or sojourner, and the Bible says Christians are sojourners in this life; our citizenship is in heaven (Phil. 3:20). Also, the word means host, which we feel we are to non-Christian guests. But the reason we have the name goes back to the time of our incorporation as a church in 1982.

By '82, we had already existed for 12 years under the even stranger name, "Fish House Fellowship." This name had never been chosen by us, but was rather a description of "the fellowship meeting at the Fish House." Fish house was the name of the original house on the Ohio State University campus we used as a

headquarters. By the 80's the house had long since ceased to exist, so calling our church by that name was absurd.

The elders met at the time of our incorporation, realizing that we would be stuck with any name we chose. Some suggested a more conventional name, like some kind of community church. But the majority didn't want to be identified with the idea of a conventional church because our field of ministry is anti-church in attitude. We decided a name that raised questions, but didn't fit any known category (that could be easily dismissed by cynical guests) would be better. At the time we were publishing a magazine called Xenos, so we decided to call it Xenos Christian Fellowship.

We considered changing our name when we moved into our new facility in 97, but decided not to. We were already worried about becoming too conventional and being viewed like a normal church, and besides, we were known widely as Xenos, and felt it would be a major headache to change our name. We decided to keep our strange name and oddball image that comes with it. Xenos members jokingly refer to each other as "Xenoids" often pronounced with a robot-like tone of voice.

For Discussion:

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How do you support your answer?

33. Planting Celebrations - Once or twice a year, Xenos holds a very popular and unusual meeting called the "Open Servant Team Meeting." This is one of the monthly meetings of the Xenos Servant Team, but is open to the public. On these Friday nights, all home groups call off their meetings if they have any, and the auditorium is jammed with people. The purpose of the meeting is to celebrate the planting of new home groups, and the induction of new members into the servant team.

Just as most churches celebrate personal conversion through baptism (as do we), this meeting celebrates the other end of the growth continuum. Instead of merely celebrating the beginning of Christian growth, this meeting celebrates the relative completion of the process. It's really a celebration of successful discipleship. We define successful discipleship in our church as helping people qualify for the

Servant Team. Likewise, we teach home church leaders that the goal of their task is to duplicate their group, leaders, workers, and all.

At the meeting, one of the lead pastors delivers a short lecture on where the fellowship is, or on a related motivational topic. Then the leaders of each group that has successfully planted itself comes up on the stage along with the leaders of the new group. An elder briefly interviews one or two of the leaders, and shares a short history of their group, or human-interest story that happened during their journey. When the group is congratulated, the standing room only crowd goes crazy with applause and cheers. Most open servant team meetings introduce 4 to 10 church plants, which means leaders of 8 to 20 groups are assembled on the stage. After the introductions, the elders of the church come up and lay their hands on the whole group, praying for their mission like the elders in Antioch prayed for Paul and Barnabas. (Acts 13:3)

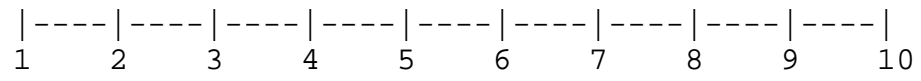
After all the new home groups are introduced, the new inductees to the Servant Team are brought up to the stage, along with the person who nominated each. This could amount to 50 to 150 people. Each new member's ministry roles in the church are itemized, and they are personally welcomed by one of the lead pastors, to loud cheering. Powerpoint slides for each person list their accomplishments with a picture. After the introductions, the entire board of elders come up and pray over the group, thanking God for answering our prayers for successful personal duplication.

By bringing up both the new disciples and the ones who discipled them, we hold up as role models to the church those who work hard at teaching and training disciples. Likewise, successful church planters are honored in the presence of the whole church.

Xenos leaders have been amazed at how popular these meetings are, and how edifying people consider them. Members talk for days afterward about how exciting the meeting was, and how motivated they feel to finish the job in their own home group, or their own lives. We are convinced that the meetings have stimulated house church planting and redoubled efforts at personal discipleship. We only started holding the meeting during the past few years, but wish now we had been doing it all along.

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