

COMMENTARY

BRIDE OF CHRIST

On forming an underground church

Exclusive: Scott Lively has 10 observations about fellowships meant to survive persecution



By **Scott Lively**

Published April 27, 2020 at 6:59pm

My recent WND column "[It's not too early to preparing for the underground church](#)" generated a lot of response from readers wanting to know where to find such a church near them, or how to start one. This article will address both questions. To reiterate, we're not yet at the stage where going underground is necessary, so we have the luxury of doing our planning and organizing out in the open, but the cultural trajectory we're on as a nation suggests our window of freedom may be closing, so prudence dictates we should act now.

First, a few general observations.

1. Any Christian believer has the authority to start a "church," which is more precisely a congregation, since the true church is the universal (small "c" catholic) body of believers everywhere. If we have accepted Christ, the Holy Spirit dwells within us as a constantly accessible guide to all truth, backed by the Bible, His Living Word. The Bible prescribes who should lead a congregation (essentially men of good character), but anyone can start one. Even a Bible study is a "church" in this sense.

2. Nearly everything we think of as "church life," from dress codes, to orders of service, to systems of administration, to the design of church buildings, is human invention, not biblically mandated. The real "church" of God is simply the gathering of two or more people in His name, to do the things He does mandate, which are detailed in the four Gospels and the Epistles,

grounded in the Old Testament. Gathering together to pursue greater understanding of those things as a fellowship, rather than alone, was the essence of church life in the earliest days of Christianity.

3. The best model we have for the underground church is the house church, and there are already tens if not hundreds of thousands of house churches in America, reflecting a great diversity of styles and doctrinal emphases. Ask around to find house churches near you and visit a few before you start your own, or you might decide just to join an existing one.

Now some things that define a church as "underground."

4. The primary difference of an underground church is secrecy, not by preference but necessity. The church only goes underground to avoid the persecution it would otherwise face if it gathered openly. This approach runs counter to today's church emphasis on advertising one's growth as a measure of success, but will be necessary in a time of severe persecution.

5. The method for operating with minimum risk to members is the secret cell group. Each small congregation is a cell, and the membership of the cell is not disclosed. Cell group leaders can interact to share information and maintain the broader network of believers, but individual members of one cell don't know the identity of the members of other cells, and they are thus safer from a predatory government. Large pre-COVID-19 congregations can reconfigure themselves as a collection of such cells and retain some measure of cohesiveness and pastoral supervision.

6. Church growth is not measured by numbers gathered together in one location, but by the increase of cell groups. This organic church approach occurs when individual members of a cell group go off to create their own new cells – often continuing to gather with their original group as well. This creates a fabric of personal interconnections across the body of believers.

7. What binds all of the cells together is the Bible itself. Importantly, the underground church hides and protects caches of Bibles, knowing that

destruction of Bibles is often a priority of anti-Christian governments. Biblical literacy and Scripture memorization should be highly valued in the underground church for times when no Bible may be available.

8. The means of avoiding government scrutiny is going low or no tech. This concept is especially foreign in our present social media era, but if (or when) the crackdown comes, the only truly secure communications will be live person to person conversations and hand-written notes and letters passed between trusted friends. And, knowing whether people can be trusted will come down to spiritual discernment – helped by the biblical litmus test for sincerity: asserting "Jesus is Lord!" This should be the formal greeting at every encounter among those purporting to be Christians in the underground church era, and we should all start using it now to identify fellow Remnant believers. Instead of a handshake, point up, and say "Jesus is Lord!"

9. The underground church will be the survival network for its members and converts. If "buying and selling" becomes impossible without, for example, an identity card saying you've been "vaccinated," noncompliance may depend on having an alternate "black market" to rely on, including a barter system. Stockpiling of basic necessities and tradable commodities should begin now.

10. Some suffering is inevitable if things get so bad that the church must go underground, but the blessings of family and Christian fellowship are the best remedy for whatever may come, especially when believers are constantly reminding each other of the true purpose and meaning of that season: the birth pangs are temporary and the Lord is coming soon.

My First Century Bible Church will be developing resources for those interested in the underground church network and organizing prophetically and politically "woke" pastors and other Christian leaders in our [Revolutionary Remnant Regiment](#).

To get on my list for either purpose, just send me an email at scottlivelyministries@gmail.com saying "Jesus is Lord!"

Dear WND Reader,

As America's political and culture wars rage, another battle is taking place in the news media.

Google, Facebook and the rest of Big Tech blatantly suppress Christian-conservative content while vacuuming up 90% of the advertising that once supported online news. It's a tough time for truth-oriented journalism.

WND, the nation's oldest independent news site and largest Christian website, is a rare combination of experienced professional journalists AND strong Judeo-Christian worldview. And we know most Americans—often portrayed as "ignorant hicks" and "bigots" living in flyover country—share our pro-American values and want real news, accurate information and insightful analysis on today's crucial issues.

That's what WND has delivered since 1997, all for free—no paywalls—an increasing rarity in the online news world.

Instead, we rely on the voluntary contributions of appreciative readers like you—now more than ever.

If you value WND, please make a donation in any amount to keep us alive and well. In so doing, you'll be keeping the First Amendment and American freedom alive as well!

MAKE A DONATION →



Submit a Correction



Scott Lively

Summary

Recent Posts

Contact

Scott Lively is an attorney, pastor, human rights consultant and missionary with service in more than 50 countries. He is the author of seven books including "The Pink Swastika: Homosexuality in the Nazi Party" and "Redeeming the Rainbow," a textbook on pro-family advocacy he offers freely by email in PDF form by request to scottlivelyministries@gmail.com.