



BACKYARD CHURCH
CHURCH PLANTING PROPOSAL



GREETINGS!

We cannot begin to tell you how much we appreciate you having this in your hands, reading it and considering what God may be calling you to do in response. What we have gone through in the last two years has been challenging, exciting, and at times a bit scary but we have been convinced over and over again that God has been slowly walking us to our next opportunity to make a difference for and in the kingdom of God.

Missy and I have spent the last two years being equipped to make disciples. Missy has been trained through graduate education at Friends University. I have been trained through disciple-making and church planting-cohorts through Renew.org and by a minister from West Africa named Shodankeh Johnson. His movement has converted 1 million people in the last 15 years in Sierra Leone through simple and reproducible disciple-making and church planting. We have been praying for God to show us how to use all He has taught us for maximum kingdom impact. This prospectus is the result of two years of prayer and a year of regular fasting. We are excited to finally have clarity about what God is calling us to do next!

We are convinced that there are monumental shifts taking place in the way we understand church that were coming long before COVID19 and those shifts are now accelerating. Eventually this convincing has turned into a calling to leverage this time for maximum kingdom impact. These shifts have come at the perfect time for what we are going to do next. We have started a new church plant with the goal of reproducing into a network of church plants starting in Auburn and, Lord willing, moving into other areas of the country. This network of churches is focused on simple worship, equipping Christians to use their gifts to serve other, make disciples, and reach the lost..

Why start another church? We have seen over and over how new churches spring up and are effective at shifting Christians from church to church but few to none are making a priority of making disciples of the nations (a national study recently found only 2% of churches are serious about disciple-making). Everything has converged for us to feel confident that God is calling us to this new ministry and we look forward to telling you more about it. We are excited to tell you about Backyard Church! We hope and pray what you read here will resonate with your heart so that you can get as excited about it as we are!

You are in our prayers as you consider what you are about to read that God will show you if this is something to support at this point in time.

Grace and Peace,
Leadership Team of Backyard Church

THE CHURCH IS IN DECLINE...

It has become all too clear in recent years that churches are struggling. Attendance and giving are down on average. The average age of our members is steadily increasing, in the early 60s. And if that wasn't enough, we all but stopped planting new churches. The vast majority of congregations in Churches of Christ were planted in the 1940s-1960s. According to Tod Wilson in his book "Multipliers" 99.9% of congregations don't exist past 100 years. That means the majority of our congregations are 60-80+ years old with little hope of a turn around. It is time for existing churches to put resources to birthing new congregations.

COVID19 makes this even more salient. It threatens to accelerate the decline. More and more of our people will not be coming back to our church services. They may opt to stay home or may use this as an opportunity to leave altogether. I am already seeing this in my ministry and know many other ministers who are experiencing this as well. One could argue that church may not be the same after COVID19 as it was before. As church was often seen as meeting at the building, people have become keenly aware that church exists without meeting at the building and many are further frustrated at the expense it takes to keep that model going.

Many of us were born and raised in church. It is where we learned about God. It is where we made our friends and found our faith. It is both sad and frustrating to watch all of the above unfold before our eyes to the very group that helped us find Jesus.

The reality is, it doesn't have to be this way. We can and will make choices that lead to a better tomorrow. My firm belief is that God is teeing up new opportunities right now for churches to begin new approaches, to support vibrant efforts that are making a difference. Our time away from the building has enabled us to get creative in ways that wouldn't have happened had COVID19 not been present over the last six months.

God is powerful. God is present. God has a plan. It is imperative we notice where God is already working and participate with him in the harvest He is creating in our communities. The struggle of the local church is no reflection of God's involvement in the world.

JUST IMAGINE...

What it would be like to partner in a movement that turns this narrative around! Imagine communities of believers filled with the vision and equipped to go and make disciples who make disciples...who are ready to take the torch of Jesus' Great Commission seriously again. Imagine believers who turn from passive observers to active kingdom participants, using their gifts to impact the community. Imagine a network of believers in the community sharing life together, gathering in their backyards on Sunday to praise God in a network of plants that keep everyone participating.

This is what we have been imagining and our dreams are becoming a reality. Since March, when church stopped meeting, we have been meeting in our backyard. It started with a handful of couples in our neighborhood and has grown to nearly 40 people! The sharing is powerful. It is a wonderful thing to watch people use their gifts. Man, woman and child all understand that this is their faith community and all are welcome to participate. Missy and I haven't been this energized about Sunday morning in several years!

When something meaningful is created it will attract new people. Those who are attending keep asking if they can invite their friends. Due to COVID concerns we are trying to keep it relatively small for the time being. In order to keep it small and yet also create something sustainable, there are a few things that will happen as we move forward and as we grow:

First, we are training leaders. We currently have three other couples on our leadership team. These are people we lean into for prayer and encouragement. We are now training them in reproducible disciple-making. Disciple-making will be the core DNA of Backyard Church (BYC). We are making disciple-makers, not just making disciples. We will offer this disciple-making training to everyone who attends Backyard Church.

Second, in order to keep it small, we will create more backyard churches in the Auburn-Opelika area. Our goal is to bring people in to see what we do, then train them to do this in their neighborhood. We will provide potential new leaders with training, disciple-making equipping, and resources to keep them going and keep their backyard church focused. Keeping it small allows backyard church to keep the feel that makes it so attractive to people.

By doing these things, we will plant multiple new congregations who have trained leadership to reach the unchurched. It is easy to think there is a limited number of unchurched people in Alabama. However, our county is an outlier. The state average is over 80% Christian. Our county is over 60% unchurched and we see little intentional efforts in existing churches to change that.

THE CALLING...

These changes and challenges brought about by COVID19 also bring opportunities. We have in front of us, one of the greatest opportunities for Christianity in our lifetimes. It is the opportunity to re-envision how we operate and function as a body of believers and start something fresh that equips the saved to use their gifts and reach the lost. Now is the time to equip and mobilize Christians to live life on mission, which is what God made us for!

Missy and I are seeing firsthand the opportunities that this season of transition is bringing before the kingdom of God. Just over two years ago Missy felt the need to go deeper in her faith. After much prayer and seeking God's guidance she decided to enroll in the Master's in Christian Spiritual Formation at Friends University. The entire program focuses on discipleship. At the same time, I was praying that God would teach me to disciple people. I was convicted I had to do this with my ministry but didn't know where to start. God answered that prayer in a big way. I was invited into some learning communities with Renew.org to be taught church planting and discipleship by Bobby Harrington and Shodankeh Johnson. Bobby is one of the top experts in disciple-making in Restoration Movement churches. Shodankeh, as mentioned before, is a minister in Sierra Leone, Africa leading a movement that has converted nearly 1 million people in the last 15 years through simple, reproducible disciple-making. Both of us finished our training right around the beginning of COVID. We are convicted God has lined our training and passion up for this moment.

We have had several other families coming who have been convicted that there has to be another approach to how we are "doing" church. They have been seeking new approaches and have been encouraged in seeing what God is doing through BYC. We have a friend from Uganda who drives an hour each week to join us at BYC. There is a couple in their early 70s who came their first week and she was in tears during the worship. Another couple has a husband in his mid 20s finishing his PhD in history. They come early each week to help with communion. Our new neighbors who just moved in have joined us. New neighbors also moved in across the street, a couple in their late 60s. They sit on their front porch and listen to the worship. BYC is filling a void. We believe each person has a gift that needs to be used and our traditional model of church isn't able to accommodate this level of participation. People are using their gifts and they are thrilled.

After well over a year of prayer and regular fasting we are convinced that backyard church is our next ministry. God continues to affirm this for us over and over again. We would feel unfaithful to not listen to His call and go all in on backyard church. Maybe this resonates with you as well.

PATH FORWARD

After praying, fasting, and seeking counsel from godly people, we are convicted that these are the next steps that form the path forward.

FUNDRAISING

01

We are going to be raising financial support to allow us to set aside our time to train leaders, delegate responsibilities, equip through disciple-making groups, and launch new communities. Our goal is to get two years of funding lined up that will give us margin to launch and get BYC into a more independent financial position to not need continued financial support from the outside.

TRAINING

02

We have just started training leaders who will train more leaders. This training will expand from disciple-making alone to both disciple-making and BYC leadership

DISCIPLESHIP

03

Begin discipleship training cohorts in sponsoring churches: We would like to give back to churches that support us financially by training leaders in your congregation in the disciple-making process. This will help you raise up leaders who are trained and effective at making disciples who make disciples so that you can see sustainable growth in your congregation.

MULTIPLY	
04	Reproduce in adjacent neighborhoods: Once leaders see what we do and are trained to do this in their neighborhood, we will begin launching more Backyard churches locally.

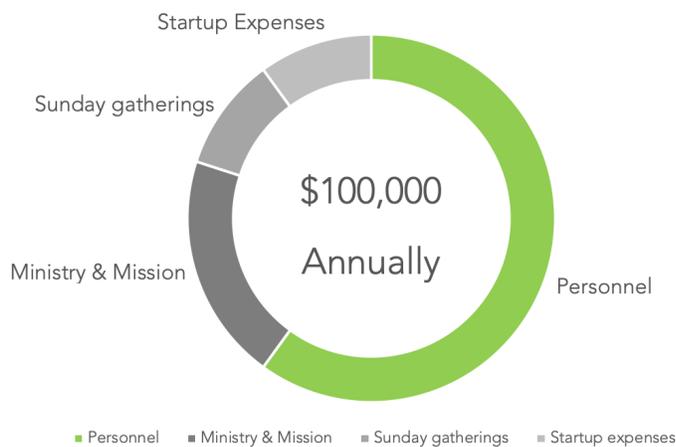
MULTIPLY NATIONALLY	
05	Reproduce around the country: Reproduce the training and backyard church around the country through online Zoom training and materials explaining our approach. We have networks in place to recruit new leaders.

MAINTAIN	
06	Maintain a network of Backyard churches for mutual support, encouragement, and possibly a monthly or quarterly large gathering of the local network of Backyard churches.

We are praying over these next steps and ask you to pray with us about it as well, that God would direct every single step and that in all things He would receive the glory!

BUDGET

We are looking for two years of financial support to give us the margin to grow backyard church into a self-sustaining movement. The budget starts off personnel heavy to get this launched. As things grow the budget will shift more to ministry and mission.



There are a few ways you can support this effort: prayer, financial support and/or connecting us with others who may be interested in helping us through prayer and finances to enable this effort to flourish.

FINANCIAL SUPPORT WITHOUT TRAINING

Some congregations will want to support this effort without the need for training your local leadership. If you are in a position that you feel called to support this effort but don't have a need for the training we would like to partner with you as well. We believe that movements need roots and partnering with established churches helps us stay grounded.

FINANCIAL SUPPORT WITH TRAINING

If you, as a supporting congregation, would like to receive disciple-making training to use in your own community please let me know and we can discuss coordinating that. This would consist of five of your staff, elders or members spending six months in a weekly zoom meeting that will walk you through a disciple-making process that is effective and reproducible. We see this as a way for our relationships to be mutually beneficial. If this interests you, let me know and we will discuss the logistics.

LET'S PARTNER

We would like to take two weeks for all of us to pray about your potential support. If you feel compelled sooner than that we are open to re-connect before two weeks but we believe that prayer must permeate every aspect of what we are doing. We will get back in touch with you in two weeks through whatever means is best for you (a call, zoom meeting, etc) after you receive this Backyard Church prospectus and look forward to seeing if God is lining us up to partner in this work through prayer, financial support, or networking us with other interested people.

If you have any questions at all, my cell number is 334-750-9919. If after reading this you would like to contribute, please make checks payable to Backyard Church and mail to P.O. Box 1089 Auburn, AL 36831. Online giving is also an option. Go to our website and click "Online Giving" to donate securely there - www.backyardchurch.org/online-giving

Thank you for considering this. You are very special to us and no matter what you decide this all belongs to God. We are excited to even have this conversation with you.

Blessings,

Matt & Missy Dabbs and the Backyard Church Leadership Team

FAQs

What is the typical Backyard Church worship like?

We start with a welcome followed by prayer and the Lord's supper. Then we have two to three songs we sing together with acoustic accompaniment. Next is a lesson from the Bible that is always practical and encourages discussion. We send out questions to the group the day before for them to answer during the lesson to encourage participation. More singing follows the lesson and we close out in prayer. That is the format of our worship but it doesn't give you the feel for what we do. Couples often serve together. Our song leaders are usually a couple who will often wrap up a song with a prayer. You will probably laugh at some point in one of our gatherings as we keep things light and informal.

What do the children do during Backyard church?

We believe inter-generational ministry and connection is vital for the spiritual growth of children. At this time our kids are with us during worship. As we leave our current ministry and engage this new work fully on October 15th, we will spend more time coordinating ministry geared toward the spiritual growth of our children and the equipping of parents to raise our children in faith.

How do we handle worship?

We have an amazing worship leading couple who lead our worship each week. Worship is typically led with an acoustic guitar and with an occasional acappella service. Song lyrics are uploaded to the web and sent out to the group over the weekend so we don't have any printed lyrics, song books, powerpoint, etc. This is to keep things simple and reproducible.

Do we have a webpage?

The webpage is under development and will be up within a few weeks. It will explain our core beliefs, our faith heritage, our leadership structure, how to get involved, and much more. The URL will be www.backyardchurch.org

How do we handle inclement weather?

We have an agreement with Auburn University to use their outdoor pavilion that is in the Kreher Nature Preserve across the street from our neighborhood. The University and the Preserve have been incredibly gracious to allow us to use their space when the need arises.



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