

# The Local Church Experiment at Pine Valley Christian Church

Wichita, Kansas

As told by Bill and Ginny Reece

Our local church experience began in Shawnee, OK, when I was minister there. I was president of the OK Christian Church State Ministers Group. When looking for a guest speaker for our annual event, a seminary professor suggested Joe Mathews because of his work in Church Renewal. Joe was invited and brought Gene Marshall and three others for a Parish Leadership Colloquy to lead a group of more than 100 ministers and wives. It was a life-changing event.

Six months later we moved to Wichita KS to start a new church. At a fellowship dinner I gave the most radical Ecumenical Institute (EI) view of church renewal that I could, and believe it or not *they called us* to be their new *ministers*. Our local church experiment began at that moment.

Six months later EI staff taught the introductory course Religious Studies-I (RS-I) and a Parish Leadership Colloquy (PLC) in Wichita. Twenty-one members of our church attended. Six months later we sent another dozen to an RS-I. We immediately organized our new church with the insights of the Ecumenical Institute model. (See enclosure- below).

We taught our version of RS-I twice a year for the next 27 years and had a number of EI courses. In addition, we sent members to Chicago for many events, helped organize a Religious House and did our own creative church renewal activities. Here is a list of 30 examples of our [church as a Social Pioneer](#).

With that introduction, I have enclosed some Wichita Eagle newspaper articles which will show some of what we were doing from the newspaper perspective. We were in the news regularly because of all our social involvement. That resulted in our being a constant influence on the city. I was called any time there was a controversial happening.

A clipping from The Eagle of Wichita, Feb. 14, 1971: What Matters in Kansas column features Rev. Bill Reece in article [“New Christianity is Here”](#) and describes his experimental church and explains the concepts of Christianity.

The Wichita Beacon, 4-8-70 describes an Agape Feast at Pine Valley Christian Church at one Sunday Morning Service. Parishioners were seated at tables nibbling away at fresh fruit, bread and cheese while the pastor “made announcements” and gave a brief homily with conversations with participants on points of clarification or disagreement. This informal worship is one kind of worship. The liturgical worship such as Easter service is another kind of worship.

The Wichita Beacon, Aug. 5, 1977, article [“Church stresses social involvement”](#) celebrates Reece’s retirement after 27 years and notes Bill’s often controversial involvement with social justice issues like protesting the Vietnam War, chairing a civil rights group for homosexuals, and involvement with ecumenical political and social organizations.

## From the Pine Valley Christian Church Directory

**A new World is Emerging.** The gift of life is good. We are totally accepted. Our past is forgiven. Our future is open to all possibility.

### We Meet for

- Corporate Church: Sunday 10:00 a.m.
- House Church: (small groups of 5-8 families) twice a month in homes for fellowship, nurture, and study with a Christian perspective.
- Theology Class: This theological seminar for laymen consists of structured dialogue on practical living, lectures on 20th century issues, and study-discussions of classical statements of contemporary theologians.
- Elementary Education: Discovery Groups for children from Kindergarten through sixth grade meet each week during the time of corporate worship. They study the meaning of Christian life. Weekend events provide study and recreation combined in retreat settings.
- Junior High and Senior High School youth each have their own house church structures for worship and study.

### We Gather Together for

- Communion is shared each Sunday to renew the meaning of the Last Supper.
- Thanksgiving celebration finds 250 black and white families sharing a feast in the Jewish temple to mark our heritage.
- Agape Feast marks the celebration of Christian love and concern.
- Services include art, drama, and music.
- Fellowship and fun are included in hobby and craft shows, house church picnics, square dance galas.
- Adults and youth approach serious Bible study during Lent.
- Children relate to "Charlotte's Web" and the Exodus.

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**THE PURPOSE** The purpose of the church is expressed in another enclosure with the Wedgeblade symbol. In the Constitution of Pine Valley Christian Church, the purpose of the church is expressed concisely in these words:

- To enable each member to live authentically and abundantly.  
**By gathering together**
  - For disciplined **study** in order to seek clarity about the Word of God for daily life,
  - And for Christian **worship** in order to respond in faith to the Word;
- To proclaim the possibility of authentic and abundant life to all people everywhere.  
**By scattering into the world**
  - to witness by word and deed to the truth of the Word,
  - to create structures of **justice** In which all people may live;
- To strive for the **unity** of all people.

In order to fulfill that purpose, we have chosen leaders, set forth goals, provided funds and created effective structures through which we can serve together.

## THE STRUCTURE

As members of the Pine Valley Christian Church, we gather regularly in basic structures for the common expression of our life together.

**The Corporate Church** is the large expression of the church in which the whole congregation gathers.

- For worship and fellowship each Sunday.
- For rites of birth, baptism, marriage and death.
- For the high celebrations of the church year and for the special ones that seem appropriate.
- For the planning and implementation of the corporate mission of the church.

**The House Churches** are the small expressions of the church in which small groups of 10 to 15 gather at least twice a month in each other's homes

- To study the Word and its implications for daily life, both individual and social.
- To witness to each other concerning the meaning of Christian life and commitment.
- To care for each other in times of sorrow, stress and crisis.
- To celebrate the significant events in each other's lives, such as birthdays and anniversaries.
- To report to each other concerning individual mission.

**The Mission Groups** are small expressions of the church formed by those who sense themselves called by God

- To be on a particular mission.
- To enter into an intentional covenant.
- To adopt spiritual disciplines, both inner and outer for the sake of the mission.
- To renew the covenant each year.

The **purpose** of these structures is to encourage each other to grow toward "Real Maturity-that measure of development which is meant by the 'fullness of Christ.' " -Ephesians 4:13