

FOR CHURCHES · TWO

The three postures

Renew, Rebirth, Reproduce.



One model, three ways in. Read the one that matches your church; the other two are here so you can see the whole map.

Renew

FOR THE CHURCH WHOSE GROUPS MINISTRY IS RUNNING ON FUMES.

You have small groups. They meet around curriculum, they're led by the same eight exhausted volunteers, they swell in September and thin by February, and if you're honest, they exist mostly to close the back door of your weekend service. Renew doesn't fix that system. It replaces it — gradually, quietly, with tables that don't need you to program them.

What changes. Groups stop being a delivery system for content and become little churches: discipleship, care, and service happening at the table, with your teaching as the foundation under all of it. The measure of a group stops being attendance and starts being health — are they together, are they growing, did one table become two.

Start fresh; don't convert. The strong temptation is to hand this kit to your existing group leaders and relabel. Resist it. Existing groups carry existing habits — the teacher habit, the curriculum habit, the ninety-minutes-of-content habit — and habits outlast relabeling every time. Instead: pick two people (not necessarily your current leaders; look for the ones people already feel safe around), hand them the Host's Guide, and let two new tables begin alongside everything you already run. Existing groups can keep meeting exactly as they are. Some will ask to become tables when they see one up close. That's the transition working — by attraction, not decree.

Your first 90 days. Weeks 1–3: choose two hosts, write your name and number in their guides, first tables gather. Weeks 4–8: stay close but stay out. Check in with hosts every couple of weeks — coffee, not meetings. Resist the urge to visit the tables; a pastor in the room turns a table back into a class for at least a month. Weeks 9–12: hosts will hit their first hard moments. This is the job now: you're the person on the front page of their guide. Answer fast, love them well, and notice who around each table people are starting to trust — those are your next hosts.

How your staff's job changes. From programming groups to shepherding them. From producing curriculum to being the safety net under fifty living rooms. From recruiting leaders to recognizing them. It's less control and more actual pastoring, and most staff discover it's the job they thought they were signing up for originally.

The two ways Renew fails.

1. *The staff can't let go of content.* If someone insists on writing discussion guides for the tables, the tables become satellite classrooms and die the same February death as the old groups. The stories and four questions are the content. Trust them.
2. *The old system and the new compete for the same calendar.* If people are asked to attend groups and tables and three other weeknight things, tables lose — they're the newest and least institutional. Prune as tables grow. Renew is a transfer of life, not an addition to the pile.

When to call for help. If ninety days in neither table has found a rhythm, or your hosts keep turning gatherings into studies, that's a normal launch problem with known fixes, and it's worth an hour with someone who's watched fifty launches. The money page in this kit says where that kind of help lives.

Rebirth

FOR THE PLATEAUED OR DECLINING CHURCH READY TO STOP TINKERING.

This is the deepest posture and the slowest. Rebirth means the congregation reorganizes as churches-within-the-church: tables become the primary unit of belonging, discipleship, and care, and the weekend service becomes the celebration of what the tables live all week. It's not a program adoption. It's a change in what your church believes church is.

Say it plainly before you start: Rebirth is a two-to-three-year turn. There is no fall-kickoff version of it. If your leadership needs visible results in twelve months, run Renew instead — it's the same road, entered gently, and it leaves you free to go further later.

Never announce a restructure. This is the closest thing Rebirth has to an iron law. The day you stand up and declare "we're becoming a church of tables," you've created a referendum, and referendums on change in a plateaued church go one way. Instead: start tables the Renew way — two, then four, then eight — and let the structure become obvious before it becomes official. When a third of your congregation is at tables and the care ministry keeps discovering needs were already met before staff heard about them, the restructure isn't a proposal anymore. It's a description.

What dies and what doesn't. Programs that exist to manufacture the connection tables now provide will fade — let them, gently, on their own schedule. What doesn't die: your worship gathering (it gets warmer — celebration is different when the family already knows each other), your teaching (tables run on it), your governance (this kit has no opinion about your polity), and your identity (Rebirth makes your church more itself, not something else wearing its name).

Your first year, honestly. Months 1–6 look exactly like Renew — a handful of tables, quiet, no announcements. Months 6–12: multiply hosts, start folding table stories into your Sunday celebration (let people hear what's happening in living rooms

without turning it into promotion), and begin the leadership conversation with your board — not asking permission for a restructure, just showing them what's growing. Year two is when the structure has to catch up with what is actually happening. Staffing, budget, what to stop doing, what Sunday becomes. Those are hard calls to make on your own, so get through a healthy year one and then ask at comehungry.org/ask — somebody who has been through it will talk it over with you.

The two ways Rebirth fails.

1. *The language changes and the tables don't.* A church that adopts the vocabulary — starts saying "tables," puts "church of small groups" on the website — without the slow work of actual living rooms has just renamed its decline. The words are the last thing to change, not the first.
2. *The pastor is the only believer.* If Rebirth lives solely in your conviction, it dies with your next call or your next burnout. Before you start, sit with three or four trusted people — staff, elders, the saints everyone actually listens to — and let them catch it or talk you out of it. If none of them catch it, the church isn't ready, and that's information, not failure.

When to ask for help. Before year two. Every church that has made this turn had somebody outside it to talk to, and the ones that tried it alone are the cautionary tales.

Reproduce

FOR THE CHURCH THAT WANTS TO EXPAND WITHOUT BUYING A BUILDING.

The traditional church plant: a hired planter, a core team, a rented school, a launch Sunday, and a runway of several hundred thousand dollars — with a survival rate you already know. Reproduce runs the other way: seed tables in the target community, let them grow and multiply by sending, and let whatever the community needs to become emerge from what's actually alive there. You're not launching a service and hoping community forms around it. You're growing the community and letting it decide what it needs.

What the mothership provides. Everything the tables can't do alone yet: pastoral backup when a table meets a moment beyond its skill, crisis care, host training, and a regular celebration — monthly at first, the tables from that community gathering with you, or eventually with each other. You're the trellis, not the vine.

What it costs. A table costs a living room and a starter guide. Your real investment is people — a couple from your congregation who live in or love that community, willing to host the first table — and patience, because tables multiply at the speed of relationship, not the launch calendar. Budget in years and shepherding hours, not dollars. Compared to a traditional church plant, the money is a rounding error; the patience is the price.

Your first year. One or two tables, hosted by your sent people, filled by *their* neighbors — not by commuters from your congregation, or you've planted a satellite small group, not a community of its own. Months 6–12: first multiplication, first community celebration, first crisis handled well (there will be one; it's how the community learns the mothership is real). Don't name it, brand it, or website it in year one. Let it be tables.

The hard question — answer it in writing before you send anyone. Tables in that community will grow people, leaders, and convictions you didn't program. The day will come when the tables there are mature enough to need a structure of their own

— and it may not look like a campus of yours. So decide now: *are you sending, or franchising?* If you can bless what it becomes — celebrate it, keep the relationship, hold it loosely — Reproduce will give your church the joy of parenthood. If you need it to become a satellite that runs your services and returns your metrics, plant a campus instead; that's a legitimate thing to build and this isn't the kit for it. Both answers are honest. Only one of them fits this pattern, and discovering which one you gave in year three, mid-conflict, is the expensive way to find out.

The two ways Reproduce fails.

1. *Colonization by kindness.* The mothership loves the new tables so much it staffs them, funds them, programs them, and visits them constantly — and the community's own leadership never has room to grow. Support looks like being reachable, not being present.
2. *Abandonment dressed as trust.* The opposite failure: tables get sent and forgotten, hit their first crisis alone, and dissolve — the standalone death, wearing your church's blessing. The named contact, the celebration rhythm, and the fast crisis response aren't extras. They're the difference between sending and abandoning.

When to call for help. Before you send the first couple. Reproduce has the fewest do-overs of the three postures — the sending conversation, the hard question, and the support rhythm are worth designing with someone who's watched it go both ways.

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