

HOW ORGANIC ARE WE?

By Donovan Gibbons

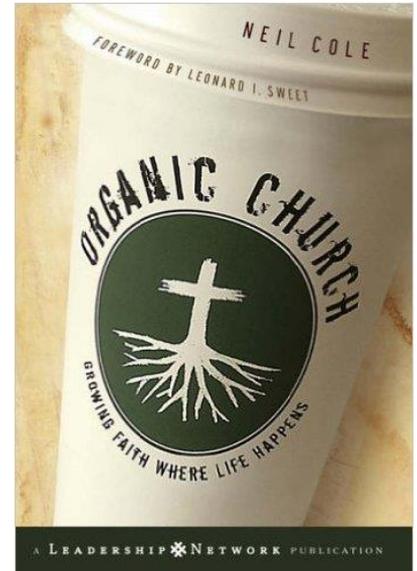
I want to encourage you to read a book.

Not just any book.

Not even a new book.

This book has been around for the last ten years - but I didn't come across it until last year.

Since reading it I have changed the way I think about church and my part in it. If you are up for a challenge then I encourage you to read it too.



The book is called *Organic Church* and was written by an American pastor, teacher and church planter called Neil Cole. The subtitle is 'Growing faith where life happens' and it is about taking the gospel out into the community where we live. Neil Cole likens the church to a living organism.

What do all living things have in common?

- They take in energy to enable them to function
- They respond to their environment
- They grow and reproduce

The church is the body of Christ – made up from living parts but functioning as one living organism. Any church that does not maintain all of its functions as a living organism is destined to decline - and eventually to die. We can see this happening in numerous churches in this country and elsewhere.

We can thank God that our church is very much alive and growing – but there is always a risk that if we start to focus inward and stop responding to the environment around us we may stunt our growth and our capacity to reproduce.

Our church vision is focussed on growth – spiritual growth through discipleship and exercise of the gifts and fruits of the Holy Spirit, and numerical growth through reaching out to unsaved people in our local community. This is a measure we can use to test how alive and healthy we are as an 'organic' church. Are we connecting with our environment – are we growing and reproducing?

We are all called to be witnesses to the Gospel of Jesus – but not necessarily to be lone evangelists. We are a body and function best when we work together rather than alone. Neil Cole makes the point that church exists whenever two or three are gathered together in the name of Jesus. He references at least ten times in the Bible where 'two or three' is suggested as an ideal group size for ministry – a basic unit of church life. When two or three work together there is greater strength, greater accountability, better communication, stronger confidentiality, and greater flexibility. Coordinating calendars for two or three is so much easier than for ten or fifteen. Finding a place to meet is easier too. A group of two or three can meet in a home, a coffee shop or a workplace - and still have space to invite two or three others to join them.

Neil Cole says that Christianity is always just one generation away from extinction – yet because of the power of multiplication we are also just one generation away from the worldwide fulfilment of the Great Commission of Matthew 28. If every Christian alive today were to lead one person to Christ every year and disciple that person so that he or she would do the same from the next year, it would take just one generation to reach the world for Christ. Do the maths for Bridgnorth – we have the potential to reach every person in the community in just seven years.

Listen to Neil Cole talking about *Organic Church* on YouTube –

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cDPHXVX4JkE&list=PLFTfJqLqLDfjcyS-r4VOiNucOs5FC8Y7>