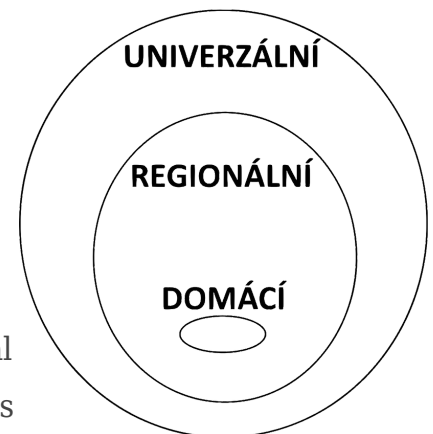


Do you remember **the dimensions of the church** as we observed them from the New Testament in one of the previous lessons? The „universal“, „regional“ (or urban) and „house“ (or local) Church. The biblical goal is not the church as a lonely group of saints - whether large or small.

For its health the God’s family of any format needs a wider **network**, ideally a wider **movement**. So, in addition to the local families of God, we have prayer meetings across several families of God on an internet platform within the network. Once in a few months we see each other in the region as several families of God together. When it is possible, we also hold meetings a few times a year, where we invite other regions or even other Christians who are open to the idea of God’s families and who operate in traditional congregations. Occasionally we have training programs on certain topics, for certain ministry or target group from the network. Quite regularly, the key people or leaders at different levels are in contact with each other. And I could go on. It is simply a furcate and at the same time actively cooperating **network** of God’s families.



Spiritual Gifts

At occasion someone asks, „How about **the spiritual gifts** in those small churches?“ From the New Testament, I don’t think that every local community has to have its own apostle, prophet, evangelist, pastor, teacher, and a complete list of about twenty other gifts of the Spirit. From biblical observation and from our experience we would say, that the Holy Spirit always made sure that the necessary gifts are available in a region or in the entire **network** of these churches. Paul was the apostle for the network of churches from the Gentiles, which he gradually built. And he sent his associates to individual locations throughout the network.

I grew up in a time when the gatherings I was taken to were usually about twenty in attendance. This little community certainly did not have all the spiritual gifts on its own! Nevertheless, no one doubted that it was the church of Jesus that could fulfill all church functions! We were connected with similar churches in the region! Brothers and sisters visited us and served us with their gifts. This is also how the local communities in the region



of Galatia functioned; Together they received one of Paul's letters: „to the churches in Galatia,,. (Galatians 1:2) Or Paul writes to the Colossians: *When this letter is read in your place, arrange for it to be read in the Laodicean church and for you to read the letter to the Laodiceans.* (Colossians 4:16)

Danger of Slipping away

Sometimes someone asks: „And can't it all **slip** somewhere, if it's such a free network; for example theologically?“ Somewhere below that is the question of theological education, the role of pastors, the appointment of other persons and so on. I understand these concerns. But imagine two situations and reason with me, which one is more threatening in terms of false teaching?

Situation one: Small groups of ordinary people read God's Word together and prayerfully reflect on it in mutual interaction. When someone says something strange or even something very clever, others have learned to immediately ask the question: „Um, and where do you see that in the text?“ (Or more widely in the Bible.)

And now the second situation: A larger group preached at by one person. He is educated in it, methodically trained, and given a special authority to do so! It is not usual for anyone in the audience to say anything.

Which of these groups do you think is more at risk of false teaching? Were cults formed in history because ordinary children of God prayerfully read God's Word together in their homes and discussed it? Or rather, various heresies appear because there was a strong leader with great authority who was basically making decisions alone?

I am not at all against a good theological education or the use of spiritual gifts! **I myself have theological education** and I am very very grateful for it! I'm just trying to talk you out of the idea that simple readers of God's word should be more prone to heresies.

For the health of the entire movement, natural mutual connection within the **network** of the God's families is very important: Connection of leaders, of disciples with certain gifting - to develop and correct each other as needed; and connection of local churches at least in certain region - at least occasionally.

Lord Jesus, thank You for the great and powerful example of the network of local churches



G17. Church As a Network

in the New Testament! It is a joy for me to observe the life and development...