

9-23-2021

Book Review: Microchurches: A Smaller Way by Brian Sanders

Jason L. Lalonde

Follow this and additional works at: <https://place.asburyseminary.edu/gcrj>



Part of the [Christianity Commons](#), [Missions and World Christianity Commons](#), [Practical Theology Commons](#), and the [Religious Thought, Theology and Philosophy of Religion Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Lalonde, J. L. (2021). Book Review: Microchurches: A Smaller Way by Brian Sanders. *Great Commission Research Journal*, 13(2), 105-107. Retrieved from <https://place.asburyseminary.edu/gcrj/vol13/iss2/12>

This Book Review is brought to you for free and open access by ePLACE: preserving, learning, and creative exchange. It has been accepted for inclusion in Great Commission Research Journal by an authorized editor of ePLACE: preserving, learning, and creative exchange.

Book Review

Microchurches: A Smaller Way

By Brian Sanders

Tampa, FL: Underground Media, 2019

132 pages

USD \$14.99

Reviewed by: Jason L. Lalonde

Brian Sanders offers a stimulating, tilt-your-head experience in his book *Microchurches: A Smaller Way*, which seeks to champion the growing movement of a smaller church expression called “The Underground.” Beyond possessing graduate degrees in Religious Studies from the University of South Florida and Applied Theology from Spurgeon’s College, Sanders’ acumen in writing on the validity and necessity of smaller churches comes from his experience in leading “The Underground” church network over the past two decades.

Microchurches is divided into two sections. Part One, “The Microchurch,” explains microchurches to be the most basic, purest, and potent form of church and “is something that all of us can do” (10). Sanders makes his case in the first three chapters by appealing to our sensibilities in relationship to little children, our self-identification as a people who have been dispersed, and the power for kingdom impact arising from a collective embodiment of servanthood evangelism. Sanders concludes that when we look at children, it helps us to remember that “being small, simple, humble and pure, to come up short is merely to remind people exactly who they are” (12). When the church is scattered, it is able to diversify itself and go into spaces where other forms of church are not able to penetrate. And lastly, when the church organizes itself as a network of

decentralized communities, it fosters a deep sense of ownership and a vibrant creativity in its mission to demonstrate the ways of Jesus in a particular context.

Chapters four through six flesh out the “minimal ecclesiology” of The Underground, which contains the three elements of worship, community and mission. It is important to note that a church affiliated with The Underground can add other essentials to be in their network, but it must maintain a commitment to worship, community and mission.

Part Two of *Microchurches* lays out the process for beginning a microchurch. It establishes the fact that planting a microchurch is open to anyone in chapter seven. Chapters eight through eleven set the sequence for execution. *Ideation* is the phase where you “have to articulate your ideas in order to form a team who will help influence and contribute” (71). From there you move to *iteration*, which is experimentation with the idea you’ve brought forth and where experiential learning is especially emphasized. Next, through experiencing successes and failures, you’re able to “set some processes in place that are proven to work” (97), which is called *codification*. And then, after codification, comes *expansion* “which in the Kingdom of God implies an equilibrium between welcoming people in and sending people out” (107). Finally, chapter twelve ends the book by giving some practical guidance for those considering starting a microchurch out of their present church expression and highlights the importance of greater strength in networks.

The goal of Brian Sanders in *Microchurch* is to encourage the reader to consider, “What is necessary to be a church?” His conviction and practice at The Underground is that the bride of Christ most authentically expresses herself in the most basic practices of worship, community and mission by going small.

Beyond the strength of the minimal ecclesiology of The Underground, there is something to be said for the simplicity of the process in order to participate in the movement. The “four discernable overlapping and sometime recurring states” (63) of ideation, iteration, codification and expansion doesn’t overwhelm the potential leader and group with massive details, administration and complexity. The simple rubric gives permission for creativity, experimentation, and failure, seeking to inspire the “What if...” residing in all of us.

Now, as for weaknesses in arguing for the microchurch throughout the book, I couldn’t help but notice places of overstatement. For example, The Underground is immediately put forth as “a comprehensive alternative to the prevailing model of church in the West” (2). To call an expression of the church comprehensive in nature is bold, to say the least, and can

unintentionally foster a “We are the right way” and an “us versus them” relationship with other kinds of churches.

Also, I found it sometimes distressing as to why Sanders seems to take such a hard line in suggesting that worship, community and mission can only take place in a smaller expression of the church. Wouldn't it be best to say these characteristics of the church need to be re-discovered in some churches, and then lay out the benefits? Is it possible The Underground is not merely a movement of going small, distinct and better than other expressions of the church, but is also offering a prophetic call to revitalization for the larger sized churches?

Overall, it is clear Sanders has a bias towards smaller groups and those who have “been disillusioned with or lost in the bigger expressions of church” (14), but that is also one of the reasons I enjoyed the book. With a growing population of religiously non-affiliated people in the West who are skeptical of large institutions, Sanders and The Underground are scratching an itch. This book however is not only for them but is also a challenge for all of God's people to truly rejoice in their worship, go deep in community and keep the gospel mission a priority.