

THE FURNACE CHRISTIAN FELLOWSHIP
CANTON, OHIO · EST. 2025

THE FURNACE PLANTING GUIDE

A Resource for Leaders Called to the Inner Room

A Word to the Hungry

You are reading this because something in you already knows. There is more — much more.

You have sat in enough services, attended enough conferences, and led enough programs to recognize the shape of what is missing. The hunger you carry is not immaturity or impatience. It is not a failure of faith. It is a sign that the Spirit has been at work in your interior life, preparing you for something that the current model of “doing church” was never designed to produce.

What you are hungry for is encounter. Not the idea of encounter, not the theology of encounter, but the living reality of it — the kind of meeting with God that leaves a mark, that changes the texture of daily life, that makes the gathered community not a performance to attend but a fire to enter.

The Furnace exists because that hunger is real, and because Jesus Himself provided the answer for it. He said, *go into your room, shut the door, and pray to your Father who is in secret* (Matthew 6:6). He was not speaking about a literal room in your house. He was pointing to something deeper — an interior place, a chamber of the spirit, accessible not by effort or method but by grace. The Inner Room.

This guide is for the leader who has heard that invitation and wants to build a community around it.

It will not give you a program. It will give you a vision — and a practical path toward making that vision real in your home, your neighborhood, and your city.

Part One: What Is the Inner Room?

Every great movement of God has a center of gravity — a theological conviction so foundational that everything else in the community orbits around it. For The Furnace, that center is the Inner Room.

Jesus spoke of it plainly. In Matthew 6:6, He instructed His disciples to enter their *tameion* — a Greek word meaning a private inner chamber, a place of concealment, a room within the room. He was not prescribing a prayer closet in the literal sense. He was disclosing the structure of the human spirit. There is a place within you, He was saying, that is already prepared for meeting with God. Go there. Shut the door. Your Father, who is already present in that secret place, will meet you there.

The Inner Room is not a method. It is not a technique borrowed from contemplative tradition, though the great contemplatives of church history stumbled toward it from many different directions. It is not a form of meditation in the Eastern sense, though silence and stillness are its natural environment. It is a place — a literal interior location within the human person — where communion with the living God is available, immediate, and transforming. The theology behind this is rich and carefully grounded in Scripture; our blog and books exist to carry that weight, and we point you there.

What happens in the Inner Room is not primarily about what you bring to God. It is about what God gives to you. In the language of John 15, it is the practice of *abiding* — remaining in the Vine, not straining toward it. You do not manufacture the encounter. You position yourself for it. The discipline is not heroic. It is the discipline of a child learning to be still in the presence of a Father who is already there.

This is the theological center from which everything at The Furnace radiates outward. The gathered worship, the community life, the model of growth, the vision for a building — all of it assumes that the people in the room have been practicing the Inner Room during the week, and that what they have seen and heard and received there is what they are bringing to the gathering.

A Furnace community that does not practice the Inner Room is not a Furnace. It is a small group with a good vision statement.

The theology of the Inner Room runs deep — deeper than this guide is designed to carry. For those who want to follow it all the way down, The Furnace Blog exists for exactly that purpose, and our books — *Return to the Inner Temple* and the *Paradigm Shift* series — trace the full theological architecture from its foundations. What matters here is the simple, irreducible core: there is a place within you where God meets you in secret. Go there. Build your life around what you find.

And then — gather with others who are doing the same.

Part Two: What Is a Furnace?

A Furnace is not a church program. It is not a small group ministry attached to a larger congregation. It is not a Bible study that has outgrown someone's living room. It is a gathered community of believers who have committed, individually and together, to building their common life around the Inner Room — and who meet weekly to share what they have found there.

The name is deliberate. A furnace does not produce warmth by accident. It is a contained space, intentionally constructed, where heat is concentrated until something is refined. The community gathered around the Inner Room becomes that kind of space — not a casual gathering of friendly Christians, but a crucible where the Spirit does transforming work in people who have chosen to be present to it together.

What a Furnace is NOT matters as much as what it is. It is not a worship concert with a sermon attached. It is not a lecture with singing before and after. It has no stage. It has no performer. It has no passive audience. Every person who enters a Furnace gathering is expected to come as a participant — full, ready to share — because every person in the room has been in the Inner Room during the week, and what they carry from that time belongs to the whole body.

This is the mantra that shapes everything: *Come Full, Ready to Share.*

The Gathering

A Furnace gathering follows a rhythm that is both ancient and radically simple. It does not require a building, a band, a budget, or a leader with a platform. It requires people who have been with God and are willing to say so.

The gathering opens with sharing. Not the social sharing of weekly events — not “what I did this week” — but the prophetic sharing of interior encounter. Each person present has spent time in the Inner Room during the week. They have seen things, heard things, received things. The gathering begins with those reports. Thirty minutes, roughly, of the body offering back to itself what God has deposited in each member during the week.

This is not performance. It is not testimony in the traditional sense. It is the body functioning as Paul described it — each member contributing what the Spirit has given, building up the whole. “You can all prophesy one by one,” Paul wrote to the Corinthians, “so that all may learn and all be encouraged” (1 Corinthians 14:31). What a person receives in the Inner Room and brings to the gathering qualifies as exactly that — prophecy in its most basic and essential sense. A word from God, carried in a human being, offered to the community.

Children remain in the room for all of it. There is no children's program at a Furnace gathering, no parallel service designed to manage young bodies away from the worshipping body. A child

who watches an elder kneel to offer bread to their parent, who hears someone share what they received in the secret place, who sees hands laid on a bowed head in prayer — that child is receiving formation no curriculum can replicate. They are learning what the Church is by inhabiting it.

From the sharing, the gathering moves into musical worship — approximately thirty minutes, unhurried, with room for the Spirit to interrupt. Between songs, or after the set has finished, space is given for whatever the Spirit is impressing on the gathered body. Worship is not a warm-up for the main event. It is itself an event — an act of collective offering that the gathering enters together.

Then comes the Table.

The Lord's Supper is not a ritual appended to the real gathering. It is the gravitational center of the gathering — the moment toward which everything else has been moving. Bread and wine, received together, as the body remembers and participates in the body of Christ. At a Furnace gathering, the elements are brought to the people where they stand. Grace moves from the center outward. The shepherd goes to the sheep.

Following the Table, the gathering enters silence. Five to ten minutes, eyes closed, the whole community together turning inward — entering the Inner Room corporately, asking the Holy Spirit to lead them. When the silence breaks, the gathering shares what was seen, heard, and received in that moment. These reports are curated for the group — the larger the gathering, the briefer each report should be, but the practice remains the same whether six people are in a living room or two hundred are in a warehouse.

From within that same flow, the shepherd teaches. Not a sermon — not the forty-five-minute centerpiece that traditional church culture has trained people to expect and evaluate. A teaching of roughly ten minutes, offered not from a platform or a pulpit but from among the people. In a home gathering, the teaching often opens naturally into group response — others contributing their own insights, widening the view, adding what the Spirit has placed in them. The shepherd is not the only one in the room who has received something. He is one voice in a community of voices, and his role is to keep the group moving forward — toward the fire, toward deeper encounter, toward the next week in the Inner Room. In a larger gathering, the teacher moves through the room as he speaks, pausing near one person, addressing another, drawing the room into the inquiry rather than delivering conclusions to it from above. The wisdom belongs to the gathering. The teaching surfaces it. For those who want to go deeper into the theological and scriptural foundations the shepherd is drawing from, The Furnace Blog carries that weight week by week — an ongoing resource for the community between gatherings.

The gathering closes with prayer — laying hands on one another for healing, lifting petitions to the Father in Jesus' name. And then dismissal. Go, or linger and fellowship. The gathering has done its work.

This rhythm is the DNA of every Furnace, everywhere, at every scale.

Part Three: How a Furnace Grows

A Furnace begins small. Intentionally, unapologetically small.

Six adults gathered in a living room is not a compromise or a starting point to be outgrown as quickly as possible. It is the right size for what a Furnace is trying to do. Six people who have been in the Inner Room during the week, who know each other well enough to share what they received there, who are willing to be known and to know — that is a community. That is the seed form of something that can change a city.

But seeds are not meant to stay seeds.

Here is the most counterintuitive thing about the Furnace model: the gathering does not change as the community grows. There is no threshold at which the intimate, participatory rhythm of a home gathering gets replaced by a stage, a sermon, and a passive audience. The Furnace gathering is what it is whether six people are present or six hundred. This is not idealism. It is ecclesiology. The gathered body of Christ does not scale by adding more seats facing a performance. It scales by multiplying itself — by dividing and sending, again and again, so that the fire spreads rather than accumulating in one place.

From Home to Homes

The first movement of growth is simple and deliberate. As the gathering grows — as new people find their way in, as the Inner Room discipline takes root and the community deepens — the group will eventually reach a size where the intimacy that defines a Furnace gathering begins to strain. When that happens, the community does not look for a larger room. It divides.

Half stay. Half go.

A mature couple from the original gathering takes six or eight people and begins a new Furnace cell in another home — a different neighborhood, a different part of the city. The rhythm they carry with them is identical to the one they came from. The DNA travels intact. And now there are two fires burning where there was one.

The process repeats. Two cells become four. Four cells become the critical mass for the next phase — not just a network of house churches, but a community large enough to dream together about something more permanent.

This is not a fast process. It should not be. A Furnace cell that divides before it is ready produces two weak communities instead of one strong one. The goal is not numerical growth for its own sake. The goal is depth that overflows — communities so full of what they have received in the Inner Room that they cannot help but multiply.

The Celtic Christian communities of 6th-century Ireland understood this principle. The great monastic networks that spread across Ireland, Scotland, and into mainland Europe did not grow by building larger monasteries. They grew by sending. When a community reached a certain size, it divided — half staying, half going to plant a new community in a neighboring place. The fire spread from hill to hill, not by becoming a larger fire in one location, but by carrying itself outward.

Toward a Gathered Space

Four Furnace cells, meeting in four homes across a city, sharing a common theology and a common rhythm, represent something significant. They represent a church — not yet housed in a permanent space, but real, rooted, and ready for the next phase of its life.

The goal was never to remain a house church network indefinitely. The house is the seed form. The vision has always been larger.

When the community has grown to the point where pooled resources make it possible, The Furnace moves toward a permanent gathered space — not a traditional church building with a stage and a sanctuary designed for passive observation, but something that looks and feels like nothing most people have attended before.

The space we envision is a warehouse — open, industrial, unadorned. Four walls. Four screens. The congregation standing inside a continuous immersive environment of projected image and lyric that wraps the entire room. No stage. No front or back. The Table of the Lord at the center. The teacher moving among the people. The elders carrying the bread and cup outward to the congregation where they stand.

The gathering in that space follows the same rhythm as the gathering in the living room. The model does not change because the building changed. The building was designed to say, in physical form, what the model has always believed — that there is no performer here, no passive audience, no hierarchy encoded in the architecture. There is only the body of Christ, gathered around its Lord.

We have written this architectural vision out in full. We invite you to read it: *A Vision for Gathered Worship* is available at thefurnacecf.org/vision — and we encourage every planting leader to sit with it, pray over it, and let it become part of the imagination they are building toward.

When even that gathered space grows beyond roughly three hundred people, the same principle applies. The community divides. Half stay. Half go — to a neighboring town, a neighboring city, a neighboring region — and begin again. A new home. A new handful of people. The same rhythm. The same fire.

This is how a Furnace grows. Not by accumulating. By multiplying through division. Not by getting larger in one place. By sending fire to new places.

The weekly home cells do not disappear when the building arrives. They continue — the small, intimate gatherings where the Inner Room is practiced together, where the community knows one another by name, where the prophetic sharing is unhurried and personal. The building becomes the larger gathered expression of a church that is fundamentally, permanently, a church of the people. The home cells are not the transitional phase. They are the permanent heartbeat.

Part Four: Are You Ready?

Before you read any further, stop.

Not because what follows is complicated. Because what follows is serious — and the difference between a Furnace that becomes a fire and a Furnace that burns out in six months usually comes down to what happens in this moment of honest self-examination.

The questions below are not a qualification test. They are not a gate designed to discourage you. They are the questions a wise friend would ask before you commit to something that will cost you more than you currently know. Answer them slowly. Answer them honestly. Answer them in the Inner Room, where the Father who sees in secret will tell you what you need to hear.

Do you have six committed adults?

Not six people who are interested. Not six people who said yes in an enthusiastic conversation after church. Six adults who understand what they are committing to — the Inner Room discipline, the weekly gathering, the vulnerability of coming full and ready to share — and who have said yes to that specific thing with clear eyes.

A Furnace cannot be built on curiosity. It requires commitment. Six people who are genuinely, prayerfully committed are worth more than twenty who are mildly enthusiastic.

Do you have a home that can hold at least fifteen people?

You are beginning with six. You will not stay at six. The gathering needs a space that can breathe — room enough for the community to grow before the division question arises, room enough for the sharing circle to feel like a circle rather than a huddle. Fifteen is the minimum threshold. A living room, a basement, a large open space — whatever it is, it needs to be able to hold a growing community with some comfort.

Do you have a mature leader — ideally a married couple — willing to serve without pay?

This is not a vocational ministry position. A Furnace cell is led by someone who works, who lives in the neighborhood, who is known in the community — and who leads from within rather than from above. The preference for a married couple is not a doctrinal requirement. It is a practical wisdom. A couple brings complementary gifts, shared accountability, and a stability that a solo leader often cannot sustain alone over the long term.

The willingness to serve without pay matters because it shapes the culture from the beginning. A community that is not supporting a professional ministry is a community that belongs to itself — and to God.

Are you genuinely willing to do church radically differently than anything you have experienced before?

This is the hardest question. And it is the one most likely to be answered too quickly.

You may have left a traditional church. You may be frustrated with programs and platforms and passive attendance. You may feel certain that you want something different. But wanting something different is not the same as being ready for what a Furnace actually requires.

A Furnace requires you to practice the Inner Room — not occasionally, not when life permits, but as the irreducible foundation of your week. It requires you to come to the gathering full, with something to share — not a prepared lesson, not a curated string of verses and teaching points, but the simple, real thing the Spirit gave you in the secret place that week. Sometimes profound. Sometimes quiet and small. Always genuine, never constructed. It requires you to share it even when you feel uncertain or exposed, and to receive from others — including people who are less theologically trained than you, people whose Inner Room experiences feel less tidy than yours — as genuine words from God. It requires you to lead without a platform, to teach without a pulpit, to pastor without a title that does the authority work for you.

It requires, in short, that you become someone the current model of “doing church” was not designed to produce.

If that excites you more than it frightens you, keep reading. If it frightens you more than it excites you, that is worth sitting with in the Inner Room before you take another step. Both responses are honest. Only one of them is ready.

Part Five: How to Begin

The first step is not finding your six people. The first step is prayer.

Not prayer as preparation for the real work. Prayer as the real work. Before you make a single phone call, before you share the vision with a single friend, before you begin imagining whose living room might work or which Sunday to gather for the first time — go to the Inner Room and stay there until you have something more than an idea. A Furnace planted from vision alone will not survive its first hard season. A Furnace planted from encounter has a root system that goes deeper than circumstance.

Pray until the vision becomes a burden. Pray until you carry it the way a father carries concern for a child — not as an interesting project but as something alive in you that you cannot put down. When the vision feels that way, you are ready to begin talking to people.

Finding Your Six

You are not looking for the most gifted people you know. You are not looking for the most theologically informed, the most experienced in ministry, or the most likely to impress a visiting pastor. You are looking for the hungriest.

Hunger is the only qualification that matters at the beginning. A person who is genuinely hungry for encounter with God — who has been circling that hunger for years without finding a community that takes it seriously — will learn everything else. A person who is theologically sophisticated but settled in their current model will resist the very things that make a Furnace a Furnace.

Have honest, unhurried conversations. Share the vision plainly — the Inner Room, the gathering rhythm, the commitment required, the long-term arc toward something larger. Do not oversell it. Do not soften the cost. The right people will lean in when they hear the real thing. The wrong people will self-select out, which is a gift to everyone.

Consider reading together before you gather formally. *Return to the Inner Temple* and the *Paradigm Shift* series exist precisely for this moment — to give a forming community a shared theological language, a common understanding of the Inner Room, and a framework for what they are about to attempt together. A group that has read and discussed these books before their first gathering will arrive at that gathering already oriented. They will know what they are entering and why.

When you have six adults who have heard the vision clearly and said yes with clear eyes, you are ready to gather.

The First Gathering

Do not wait until everything is ready. Nothing will ever be perfectly ready. Gather when you have your six, a home that can hold more than six, and a leader who has been in the Inner Room.

The first gathering does not need to be extraordinary. It needs to be real. Follow the rhythm — sharing, worship, the Table, the silence, the prophetic reports, the teaching, the prayer. Do it imperfectly. Do it humbly. Let the group feel its way into the practice together, because that fumbling, unhurried, Spirit-dependent finding of the rhythm together is itself formative. It is the community learning to trust the Vine rather than the leader.

After the gathering, debrief honestly. What felt alive? What felt forced? Where did the Spirit seem to move? Where did the group default to old patterns — performing, spectating, filling silence with words that were not given? Name these things gently and return the next week.

Establishing the Inner Room Discipline

A Furnace gathering is only as deep as the Inner Room practice of the people in the room. This is the single most important thing a planting leader must tend in the early life of a new community.

Every member needs to be spending time in the Inner Room during the week — not as a spiritual discipline in the abstract sense, not as a devotional routine, but as a genuine practice of entering the secret place and waiting for the Father who is already there. This takes time to develop. For many people, especially those formed in more activist church cultures, stillness before God feels unproductive, uncertain, even anxiety-producing at first.

Be patient with this. Teach it gently. Model it transparently — share your own Inner Room experiences with vulnerability, including the times when the silence felt like nothing but silence. Create a culture in the gathering where a simple, quiet report is as welcome as a dramatic one, where “I sat with Him and did not receive anything in words, but I felt held” is as valid a contribution as a vision or a prophetic word.

The depth of the gathering will grow as the depth of the individual Inner Room practice grows. There is no shortcut to this. Tend it with care.

Rhythms and Cadences

Beyond the weekly gathering, a healthy Furnace community needs at least two other rhythms in place.

Personal Inner Room practice, daily or near-daily, is the foundation everything else rests on. The gathering is where the community shares what it has received. The receiving happens in the secret place during the week.

Relational connection outside the gathering keeps the community from becoming a weekly spiritual experience disconnected from ordinary life. Share meals. Know each other's families. Be present in one another's hardships. A Furnace community that only sees each other on Sunday mornings will not have the depth of trust that genuine sharing requires.

Everything else — outreach, service, theological formation — grows naturally from these two foundations. Do not add programs to compensate for the absence of roots. Tend the roots and let the fruit come in its season.

One more thing, and it matters: you will not be doing this alone. Part of what it means to plant within the Furnace network is that you have access to the people who have walked this path before you. Before your first gathering, expect a conversation — unhurried, personal, by video call — with Scot Lahaie, the founding pastor of The Furnace. Bring your questions, your uncertainties, the specific shape of your community and context. And when the time is right, expect a visit — someone from The Furnace coming to sit in your living room, to participate in your gathering, to model the rhythm alongside you and help you find your footing. The vision travels best in person.

Part Six: The Furnace Network

A Furnace cell is not a franchise. It is not a satellite campus. It is not a church plant in the traditional denominational sense, where a sending body retains authority over doctrine, finances, and pastoral appointments. A Furnace is an autonomous community — self-governing, self-funding, led by people God has raised up within it — that has chosen to identify with a larger family of communities who share a common vision, a common rhythm, and a common name.

That distinction matters. The Furnace network is held together not by organizational structure but by relationship, theology, and culture. You do not join the network by signing a franchise agreement. You join it by sharing the fire.

What the Network Offers

Affiliation with The Furnace network means you are not building in isolation. It means you have a family. It means access to the theological resources — the books, the blog, the podcast — that articulate the Inner Room vision and give your community ongoing material for formation and depth. It means a relationship with the founding community in Canton, Ohio, including the personal onboarding conversations and the in-person visit described in the previous section. It means connection to other Furnace communities across the country — leaders who are navigating the same questions, facing the same challenges, and discovering the same joys that you are.

It means that when you divide and send half your community to plant a new Furnace in a neighboring neighborhood, that new community is born into the same family. The network grows as the fire spreads.

What the Network Asks

Affiliation is not without expectation. The Furnace name and brand carry a specific theological identity — the Inner Room, the gathering rhythm, the model of growth by division, the vision of a gathered space with no stage and no hierarchy encoded in the architecture. To carry the Furnace name is to carry that identity.

The network asks three things of affiliated communities.

Fidelity to the vision. A Furnace community gathers around the Inner Room. It practices the rhythm. It grows by dividing. It keeps the Table at the center. Communities that drift from these essentials — that reintroduce a stage, that replace the sharing circle with a sermon series, that abandon the Inner Room discipline in favor of a more program-driven model — are no longer functioning as a Furnace, regardless of what they call themselves.

Relational accountability. Affiliation means staying in relationship with the network — not reporting to a denominational office, but maintaining the kind of honest, reciprocal connection that allows the broader family to speak into your community's life and you to speak into theirs. An annual gathering of network leaders, regular communication, and a willingness to receive counsel when things go sideways are the practical shape of this commitment.

Stewardship of the name. The Furnace name and brand are held in trust by the founding community. Affiliated communities use the name and the visual identity with care, understanding that how they represent themselves reflects on the entire network. Communities that misuse the name, that bring the Furnace identity into disrepute, or that depart significantly from the shared vision may be asked — graciously, relationally, and as a last resort — to affiliate under a different name.

The Covenant

Before a community gathers under the Furnace name, we ask the planting leader to sign a simple one-page covenant — a plain-language document that gives shape to the commitments described above. There are no fees. No legalese. No denominational machinery. Just a shared statement of intention, signed by the planting leader and countersigned by a representative of The Furnace network, that says: we are family, we share this vision, we commit to these relationships, and we agree to part ways graciously if our paths diverge.

The covenant is part of the onboarding process — reviewed together during the initial video call with Scot, signed before the first gathering, and kept as a reference point for the relationship going forward. It is the handshake that makes the affiliation real.

An Invitation

The Furnace network is not yet large. It is, at this writing, a community in Canton, Ohio, with a vision that is larger than one city and a conviction that the Inner Room is not a niche theological interest but the recovery of something the whole church has been waiting for.

If you are planting, or sensing the call to plant, you are not too early. The network is forming now, and the communities that enter early will help shape what it becomes. This is the moment to be part of something from the beginning — before it is established, before the path is worn, when the fire is still finding its shape.

We are not looking for followers of a movement. We are looking for people who have been to the Inner Room and cannot stop talking about what they found there.

If that is you, the next step is simple. Reach out. Tell us where you are and what is stirring. The conversation costs nothing and begins everything.

The Fire Spreads

There is an old story from the Celtic church — of a monk carrying a lit flame in a lantern across the Irish countryside, walking from one hill to the next, stopping at each settlement to share the fire. He did not build a larger lantern. He did not gather all the people to one hill. He walked. He shared. And the light spread across a dark island until the darkness could not contain it.

This is the image we carry.

The Furnace is not trying to build the largest church in your city. It is not trying to create a movement with your name on it. It is trying to carry a fire — the fire of the Inner Room, the fire

of genuine encounter with the living God — from one living room to the next, from one neighborhood to the next, from one city to the next, until communities of people who have been with God in the secret place are gathered in every corner of this nation and beyond.

You are reading this because the fire is already in you. You felt it when you read about the Inner Room. You felt it when you imagined six people gathered in a living room with nothing to offer but what they received in the secret place during the week. You felt it when you read about the warehouse with no stage, the Table at the center, the elders moving outward with the bread.

That feeling is not sentimentality. It is the Spirit bearing witness to something real.

The next step belongs to you. Take it in the Inner Room first. Stay there until the vision becomes a burden, until the burden becomes a call, until the call becomes a name and a place and a handful of hungry people who are ready to gather around the fire.

And then reach out. We are here. We are for you. And the fire spreads best when it is carried together.

To begin the conversation, visit thefurnacecf.org or contact us directly at info@thefurnacecf.org.

*To go deeper into the theology of the Inner Room, visit [The Furnace Blog](http://blog.thefurnacecf.org) at blog.thefurnacecf.org, or explore our books — *Return to the Inner Temple* and the *Paradigm Shift* series (coming to Amazon in fall 2026).*

To read the full vision for our gathered worship space, visit thefurnacecf.org/vision.