

CHAPTER TWO

A BRIEF INTRODUCTION TO THE CELL CHURCH MODEL

A creational ecclesiology begins with the diverse complexity of created reality and derives its logical coherence from a continual comparison between derived theory, based on reason and tradition, and experiential reality informed by general or natural revelation. A true ecclesiology must arise out of reality as God has created it and out of Scripture where God describes it. Created reality is constantly changing; a true ecclesiology will be able to explain and predict those changes. A New Testament ecclesiology will be able to explain the process of change at work in the Church; it will be able to explain church growth and the historical development of the New Testament Church into the Traditional Church. As the Church is the outcome of the work of Jesus, ecclesiology is the central and dominant concept in the evolving theology of the New Testament. An inductive theology will look for order and patterns in current reality. This project proposes a change-friendly, disciple-making ecclesiology clarified by scientific research on systemic change by Peter Senge, Everett Rogers and Edwin Friedman.

Peter Senge's work on systems identifies components of natural systemic patterns of human interaction. One of these system archetypes is Limits To Growth.¹ It consists of

¹Peter Senge, *The Fifth Discipline: The Art And Practice of the Learning Organization* (New York: Doubleday, 1990), 79-88, 95-104, 124-126, 227-232, 379-380, 389-390.

two components, a reinforcing process and a balancing process, which interact to preserve homeostasis in systems. A reinforcing process is a cycle of events which create an intensifying trend that can be positive or negative. Senge's example of a reinforcing process is a snowball rolling downhill. The reinforcing process is an *antithesis* that brings challenging pressure upon an established order functioning as *thesis*; the result of that interaction is *synthesis*, which becomes the new *thesis* for another cycle.²

A balancing process functions like a home heating and air conditioning system. It remains dormant until a heating or cooling trend triggers a thermostat correction. The balancing process then acts in strength sufficient to reverse the trend and keep the temperature at a familiar equilibrium, known as homeostasis or the "comfort zone." The thermostat correction helps the system to manage trends while a trend is still amenable to control, thus ensuring that the balancing process is always operating well within its capacity to control the system and maintain the balance of homeostasis. Discomfort and anxiety trigger a thermostat correction in the system which prevents change.

The same interaction that can reverse a negative change that leads to decline can also prevent positive change which would benefit the system. If discomfort and anxiety create a perception of danger or loss of control, then the balancing process will take control and restore the previous homeostasis.³ All methods of leadership, evangelism and

²Church historian Ernst Troeltsch used the Hegelian dialectic to describe a two-hundred-year cycle of innovative sects (antithesis) becoming change resistant, decaying, traditional churches (thesis/synthesis) pressured to change by a new antithesis of innovation. Elmer Towns, *Is The Day of the Denomination Dead?* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1973), under <http://www.elmertowns.com/index.cfm?action=bksonline> (accessed June 13, 2007), 60-78. Cf. Guder, *Missional Church*, 54-60, 125-126.

³In this ministry context, homeostasis includes and maintains the four systemic problems described in Chapter 1.

church growth occur in the reinforcing process; all resistance to change occurs in the balancing process. The key to overcoming Limits to Growth, according to Senge, is to improve the competence of the balancing process to cope with challenge so that it can adapt to a trend without disrupting homeostasis.⁴ Balancing process competency is about management rather than leadership.

There is a competency limit to the numeric growth of a church. Heylighen's Generalized Peter Principle states that "in evolution systems tend to develop up to the limit of their adaptive competence."⁵ In nature a species population will naturally reproduce up to the limit that can be supported by the environment. Yoido Full Gospel Church is the world's largest church with more than 700,000 members. As the largest church, it represents the highest level of competency in a local church; therefore, its management processes and structure are the model for the "best practice" or highest competency known. While worship is central to Yoido Church, growth is largely due to the world's most effective discipleship system; Yoido is a cell church.

Small groups called cells minister to people and bring them through stages of prevenient, justifying and sanctifying grace to spiritual maturity.⁶ As cells begin to proliferate, the organizational infrastructure of the cell church becomes crucial in keeping growth orderly and healthy by managing the disciple-making work of the cells. This

⁴Senge, *The Fifth Discipline*, 101-102.

⁵Francis Heylighen, "The Generalized 'Peter Principle,'" *Principia Cybernetica Web*, ed. F. Heylighen, C. Joslyn, and V. Turchin, <http://pespmc1.vub.ac.be/PETERPR.html> (accessed June 18, 2007).

⁶Traditionally, as with Wesley's class meeting, cells are used only as a means of sanctifying grace to retain and mature the converts gathered through preaching. Bill Easum and Bil Cornelius, *Go Big: Lead Your Church to Explosive Growth* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2006), 51-52, 125. Yoido intentionally uses cells as a means of prevenient grace for explosive growth.

supervisory infrastructure extends the competency limit of the growing church, allowing a healthy core group to grow from twelve leaders to over 100,000 leaders smoothly cooperating to make disciples.⁷ This increased competency in the balancing process creates the necessary room for growth, and the reinforcing process fills the extra capacity automatically. The challenge in church growth is not to discover new methods of evangelism; growth occurs almost automatically in response to an increase in system competence.

Cell churches occur in a sociological context that is far different from the Illinois Great Rivers Conference. Cells in third world countries flourish best among the impoverished, uneducated, unemployed, oppressed and powerless. Cells provide very effective tools for people to overcome these conditions, which are rarer but not unknown in the Illinois Great Rivers Conference.

A rising tide does not float all boats; while the world's largest churches are found in Seoul, Korea, they are far outnumbered by churches of fifty or less:

Seoul's skyline after dark is filled with neon crosses, mounted on the tops of buildings where a church exists. There are literally hundreds of them! A Presbyterian pastor said to me, "Most of those crosses mark small churches with fewer than fifty members. They never seem to grow beyond that figure." Those who seek to discount the amazing growth of the cell group churches in Korea must understand not all their churches are growing at the same rate.⁸

⁷The span of control in cell management infrastructure differs and is a matter of debate. Yoido uses a 5x5 model where one mentor supervises five leaders. The second wave G12 structure expands the span of control to twelve, as Jesus did; many churches are shifting from the 5x5 to the G12. Joel Comiskey recommends that American churches in the third wave reduce the span of control to three for volunteers. Cf. Joel Comiskey, *From Twelve to Three: How To Apply G12 Principles In Your Church* (Houston: Touch Publications, 2002), 9-10, 13-17, 49. Traditional management theory advocates a span of control of six direct reports for one manager.

⁸Ralph W. Neighbor, Jr., *Where Do We Go From Here? A Guidebook for the Cell Group Church*, 10th Anniversary ed. (Houston: Touch Publications, 1990), 41.

Small churches are the norm in Seoul, Korea, as elsewhere in the entire world. Yoido Church, like the New Testament church of Acts, has somehow overcome normal and natural systemic limits to church growth. Their disciple-making systems rapidly fill up organizational capacity with new converts to the highest possible size in a context where much smaller churches are culturally normative. Eventually these rapidly growing churches also reach their limits to growth; otherwise the mathematics indicate they would have converted the entire world to Christ long ago. The real issue in conversion growth lies not with improving methods of evangelism in the reinforcing process but with overcoming resistance in the balancing process.

Discipleship Systems

Craig Miller defines a faith community as made up of two cooperative, interacting components: worship and a discipleship system.⁹

The primary evangelistic strategy of the 21st century is the establishment of new faith communities . . . A faith community is created when a worship experience is tied to a discipleship system. A worshiping group without a discipleship system is not a faith community; it is simply a place to worship God. A faith community intentionally creates settings that link worship to discipleship and spiritual formation.¹⁰

In a discipleship system, converts learn behavior obedient to the commands of Christ, including the command to make disciples. New faith communities reach out to a people

⁹Craig Kennet Miller, *NextChurch.Now: Creating New Faith Communities* (Nashville: Discipleship Resources, 2000), 114, 116. Balancing the dual aspects of the large group worship service and a discipleship system of cells in a “two winged church” is a major emphasis of cell church author Bill Beckham, *The Second Reformation: Reshaping the Church for the 21st Century* (Houston: Touch Publications, 1995).

¹⁰Craig Miller, *NextChurch.Now*, 6; see also 50-51.

group, involve them in worship that praises God and spiritual disciplines which systematically develop a person as a Christian disciple and a maker of disciples.¹¹

Discipleship systems cooperate with Jesus to support God's work of helping people progress through phases of prevenient, justifying and sanctifying grace.

A discipleship system is a natural, biblical process of grace and the primary task of a church.¹² A healthy discipleship system begins with God's work with the lost in prevenient grace, moves a person through the landmark experience of justifying grace, and forward in God's work to mature the faithful in sanctifying grace. As a process, a healthy discipleship system consists of clear, precise steps toward a clear, precise goal. Specific steps will vary; uniformity is not necessary. The progress of individuals through each of the steps in the process can be measured. In a discipleship system, God utilizes people to help other people grow in faith, move through maturation stages and then make their own disciples just as adults in nature form partnerships to produce children and raise them to become parents.

¹¹Faith communities practice spiritual disciplines. Traditional spiritual disciplines, however, as defined by Richard J. Foster in *Celebration of Discipline: The Path to Spiritual Growth* (New York: HarperSanFrancisco, 1998), do not focus on evangelism. They arose during the era of Christendom when a local community was perceived to be a Christian one; spirituality therefore did not require evangelism so much as spiritual growth or developing one's own spirituality. Traditional spiritual disciplines allow one to form one's own spirituality, as Paul encouraged believers to "work out your own salvation with fear and trembling" (Philippians 2:12).

The Great Commission, however, does not speak of a people making themselves into disciples or nurturing their own spirituality, which is fundamentally an act primarily for one's own benefit. The Great Commission commands that someone other than ourselves is to go in order to form us spiritually into disciples and then teach us to obey. Jesus directly made disciples and personally taught them to obey; to be like Jesus would be to do the same. The responsibility of all Christians to personally evangelize and methods to accomplish this goal are not to be found in most writing on spiritual maturity or spiritual disciplines that I have reviewed. One cannot be like Jesus without making disciples. The one exception outside of the church planting literature is Rick Warren, *The Purpose Driven Life: What On Earth Am I Here For?* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2002), 279, 281-288.

¹²Craig Miller, *NextChurch.Now*, 106.

If one is to observe all the commands of Christ, as demanded by the Great Commission, that obedience must include the Great Commission. To be a faithful follower of Jesus Christ means that each person goes, makes disciples and teaches them mature obedience to all the commands of Christ, including the Great Commission. While Jesus did heal, preach and teach, his primary activity was relationally equipping his disciples. No concept of holiness or "being like Jesus" is accurate without this priority. One cannot be like Jesus without making disciples. The making of disciples cannot be delegated to institutions, clergy or others who are evangelistically gifted. Jesus commands it through the Great Commission as the responsibility of every faithful individual.

It is rare in this twofold expression of ministry for worship and the discipleship system to be in balance. Normally one will gain a priority and the other will be neglected. When worship has a priority over the discipleship system, then proclamation or preaching will be perceived as the primary means of evangelism.¹³ The role of proclamation has been prioritized over the discipleship system in the Church in the centuries since Constantine.

As described in Chapter 1, conditions on the American frontier allowed for a great evangelical success through proclamation. These new faith communities consisted of a worship service and a very simple discipleship system in a highly relational environment.¹⁴ A membership increase of one to four million members from 1860-1920 coincides with the end of the requirement that all Methodists participate in class meeting as a condition of

¹³For a statistical example of dissatisfaction with the long term results of a proclamation priority for evangelism, see Jan David Hettinga, *Follow Me: Experience the Loving Leadership of Jesus* (Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress, 1996), 101-104, 111-117.

¹⁴Usually no more than Sunday School, and often merely conversations before and after worship and other events. This model continues to the present day in many small churches which are no longer effective at making disciples. Cf. Craig Miller, *NextChurch.Now*, 117-119.

membership.¹⁵ This phenomenon on the frontier could be called Prairie DNA; it is evangelism with an emphasis on worship and proclamation while minimizing the work of a discipleship system.

Institutional churches are attempting to update the traditional proclamation model.¹⁶ Contemporary worship is an attempt to update the traditional form to create a proclamation event that draws a crowd for making disciples in the current sociological context. Growing megachurches known for contemporary worship, however, often have robust discipleship systems that gather the crowd in prevenient grace and disciple it afterward in sanctifying grace.¹⁷ The discipleship system is the engine of growth in these great churches; copying the attributes of megachurch contemporary worship rarely results in quantitative or qualitative church growth. Poor quality worship with guitars, drums, projectors and a plexiglass pulpit is still poor quality worship.

The smallest churches in the world are worship driven; often worship is their only significant program. If these churches were unable to provide worship, they would disappear overnight. Worship is all that links the people, and they function more like an audience than a congregation.¹⁸ In times of persecution when large public worship services

¹⁵Charles Edward White, "The Rise And Decline Of The Class Meeting," *Methodist History* 40, no. 4 (July 2002), <http://myweb.arbor.edu/cwhite/cm.pdf> (accessed June 13, 2007), 6.

¹⁶For an example of an attempt to update the institutional church, see Brian D. McLaren, *The Church on the Other Side* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2003).

¹⁷This is the heart of Willow Creek's seven-step strategy, which defines a process where seeker-friendly individual relationships as a means of prevenient grace lead to seeker-sensitive worship and finally to seeker-supportive small groups as a means of sanctifying grace. Cf. Bill Hybels, *The Seven Step Philosophy* (Barrington, IL: Seeds Tape Ministry, 1999), tape c9002.

¹⁸Rodney Stark and Charles Y. Glock, *American Piety: The Nature of Religious Commitment* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1968), 173, 221.

cannot be held, discipleship systems continue to function. Believers of the Ethiopian *Meserete Kristos* movement grew tenfold, from five thousand to fifty thousand during nine years of persecution without public worship that ended in 1991.¹⁹ Growth also occurred under similar conditions in China.²⁰ The discipleship system practiced in homes continued to produce believers in the absence of open, public worship.²¹ When public worship resumes, the world is astonished at the growth of these churches during a time of persecution and without the pulpit ministry Americans deem necessary. The discipleship system continues to function and make disciples whether or not there is public, Christian worship.²² This continuing growth when persecution prevents public preaching suggests that, with an effective discipleship system in place, the form worship takes is irrelevant to disciple-making. The New Testament record indicates that a particular form of worship is not necessary to build a thriving, growing, disciple-making church based on the example

¹⁹For growth in the Sudan Interior Mission in Ethiopia, 1938-1943, see Bethel University, *Ethiopian Protestantism: The "Pente" Churches in Ethiopia*, [www.bethel.edu/~letnie/Ethiopia Protestantism.html](http://www.bethel.edu/~letnie/EthiopiaProtestantism.html) (accessed June 13, 2007). Cf. Jeremy Wells, "Ethiopia: 'The Country Blessed of God'," *Christianity Today*, July 1, 2005.

²⁰For current restrictions on worship in China, see U.S. Department of State, *International Religious Freedom Report 2006*, <http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/irf/2006/71338.htm> (accessed June 18, 2007). The church multiplication movement strategy is rapidly planting indigenous churches in China without flashy public worship considered a requirement for growth in the United States. David Garrison, *Chapter 2: CPMs Up Close: A Region in China*, <http://www.imb.org/CPM/Chapter2-ChinaRegion.htm>. David Garrison, *Church Planting Movements: How God Is Redeeming a Lost World* (Midlothian, VA: WIGTake Resources, 2004), 49-64. Cf. David Yonggi Cho, *Successful Home Cell Groups* (Gainesville, FL: Bridge-Logos, 1981), 82-84.

²¹Persecution also frees the discipleship system from the negative influence of an institutional church worldview and stranger evangelism. During persecution, no energy is invested in maintaining an institutional church; it all goes to disciple-making.

²²For a historical example of "secret evangelism" in the Protestant Reformation, cf. Rodney Stark, *For the Glory of God: How Monotheism Led to Reformations, Science, Witch-hunts, and the End of Slavery* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2003), 95-100, 119.

of the early church described in the book of Acts.²³

The Great Commission of Matthew defines evangelism through a discipleship system; in Mark the emphasis is upon proclamation.²⁴ On the day of Pentecost, Peter preaches one sermon and three thousand converts result (Acts 2:41); pastors have sought to reduplicate these results for centuries without success. The number of converts at Pentecost and thousands more in the days that follow are more the result of the discipleship system which Jesus modeled and taught for three years prior to the cross than Peter's sermon. If enough wood is stacked properly, a single match can start a great fire. Jesus spent three years stacking the wood in preparation for the church of Acts. While the disciples continued to practice the discipleship system of Jesus, the first priority was to light the fires Jesus had already prepared throughout Israel by preaching the resurrection.²⁵ Jesus said, "I will build my church," and demonstrated the necessary methods over three

²³The Great Commission does not command us to worship. Jesus does not conduct worship (as we would define it) in the New Testament, nor do the disciples. The church of Acts attends Jewish, not Christian, worship in the temple where Jesus Christ is neither named or honored in liturgy. Neither Jesus nor the disciples have any leadership role or control in the worship that takes place in the temple. Temple liturgy was not Christian and did not express Christian belief or theology. The disciple-making work of the Church of Acts occurs without the disciples having the slightest influence on the worship forms of the Temple until Acts 6:7. (Presumably an attempt to influence temple worship results in their immediate ejection via persecution by the balancing process of the Temple system.) Nor does it seem that they sought to influence worship forms at all; they seem perfectly content to attend the temple and worship as they always had prior to the resurrection of Jesus. There is no New Testament correlation to contemporary or traditional worship in Acts 1-6.

²⁴Other references include Mark 3:14, 16:15, 16:20; Luke 24:47, Acts 5:42, Romans 10:14.

²⁵Every community throughout Israel had a few who had experienced miracles, more who had seen them, some who had spent some time following Jesus, and many who had heard him teach. After the day of resurrection, proclamation would be enough to crystallize this proto-network of prechristians into a functioning local church. Discipleship systems work with God in prevenient grace to prepare people for a crystallizing moment of justifying grace. What is called the "Messianic Secret" may be no more than Jesus building this proto-network in every village. For the role of dense social networks in conversion, cf. Katherine S. Hutter, *The Mormon Church's Impact on Chilean Democracy*, http://www.iadb.org/ethics/documentos/hut_them-i.pdf (accessed June 13, 2007).

years of teaching.

The discipleship system is the highest priority in third world cell churches. If Jesus is Lord, then the Great Commission is the primary expression of faith. If the Great Commission is a priority, then developing every Christian to be a disciple-maker is a necessity, and cells are considered to be the best vehicle for that purpose.²⁶ These four priorities of the cell church are powerfully stated in the purpose of the Elim Church of El Salvador:

1. I have a purpose.
2. My purpose is winning souls.
3. I fulfill my purpose best in a group.
4. I will never be satisfied until I fulfill my purpose.
5. I have no promise of tomorrow.²⁷

Cell churches believe, as Jesus said, "The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few; pray therefore the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest" (Luke 10:2). The harvest is ready; what is lacking are the laborers willing and prepared to labor. The discipleship system of the cell church produces these laborers in great number, and they bring a large harvest of persons into the cell church. Worship plays an important role, but it does not overpower the work of the discipleship system in prevenient, justifying and sanctifying grace.

²⁶This study guide defines a cell church as having four priorities ranked in order of importance in which all members are expected to participate: *Jesus is Lord*, leading to prayer which leads to clear, specific, written goals. If Jesus is Lord, the second priority is *evangelism* through making disciples (Matthew 28:19). If the Great Commission is a priority, then teaching mature, obedient discipleship is a priority fulfilled by clear *equipping tracks* (Matthew 28:20). Finally, *cells* are the preferred and primary method to fulfill these priorities.

²⁷Stockstill, *The Cell Church*, 53. Cf. Billy Hornsby, *The Cell Driven Church: Bringing in The Harvest* (Mansfield, PA: Kingdom Publishing, 2000), 15, 35.

The Yoido Full Gospel Church Discipleship System

The Yoido Full Gospel Church of Seoul, Korea, provides the fundamental pattern for all cell churches. Dr. Cho says: “Our cell group system is a net for our Christians to cast. Instead of a pastor fishing for one fish at a time, organized believers form nets to gather hundreds and thousands of fish. A pastor should never try to fish with a single rod but should organize believers into the ‘nets’ of a cell system.”²⁸ A cell church is “a church that has placed evangelistic small groups at the core of its ministry;” the primary purpose and focus of the cell groups is evangelism.²⁹

Karen Hurston explains the challenge of understanding this church of 700,000 members with the folktale of three blind men who encounter an elephant, each describing the part which they have touched. Westerners find what they seek at Yoido, and frequently leave with an awareness of only one part of the whole system which they emphasize back at home in their own adaptation of the cell innovation.³⁰ Yoido Church is so large and complex that most descriptions contain only a snapshot of its reality at a given time. This project is no exception and page limitations allow only an overview of the cell church discipleship system that began at Yoido delimited by the needs of small United Methodist churches. Cell church theory has evolved from the basic pattern formed at Yoido into four distinct waves of innovation which advocate disciple making through cell

²⁸Karen Hurston, *Growing the World's Largest Church* (Springfield, MO: Gospel Publishing House, 1994), 107, 164.

²⁹ Joel Comiskey, quoted by Steve Cordle, *Church In Many Houses: Reaching Your Community Through Cell-Based Ministry* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2005), 22.

³⁰For an example of one of these summaries based on generalizations, correct in principle but not in the details, see Merton P. Strommen, *The Innovative Church: Seven Steps to Positive Change in Your Congregation* (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Fortress, 1997), 143-144.

groups in a manner effectively adapted to their cultural contexts.³¹

The Yoido Full Gospel Church began in a time of economic and religious desolation after thirty five years of Japanese occupation and three years of the Korean War. Thousands of refugees came to South Korea to live in poverty and disease. The old ways and the old religion were not working, and the people were ready for a new religion and a new way of life.³² Hard times are fertile soil for the seed of the Gospel.

The Yoido Full Gospel Church was founded on May 15, 1958, by a middle-aged woman. Jashil Choi had found Christ after she and her three daughters were abandoned by her husband. Mrs. Choi attended the two-year Assemblies of God sponsored Full Gospel Bible Institute where she met and encouraged another student by the name of Yonggi Cho.³³ Mrs. Choi set up a tent on ten thousand square feet of land given to her in the poor section of Bulkwangdong and asked Yonggi Cho to be the pastor while she would serve

³¹I posit four waves of development in the evolving cell church movement. The first wave is Yoido Church itself and its like; Karen Hurston and Ralph Neighbor are the best resources for the first wave. The second wave is made up of the South American cell churches such as Elim Church, ICM and the G12 movement; Joel Comiskey is the authority on the churches of the second wave. The third wave consists of American churches which have implemented their own innovations of the cell church; examples are Bethany World Prayer Center (www.bccn.org) and cellish churches such as Willow Creek, Saddleback and Ginghamburg United Methodist Church. In the first three waves, cell policies increase adaptive competency, making larger, disciple-making churches of multiple thousands possible.

The fourth wave is the use of cells in a Church Planting Movement strategy rather than a church growth strategy; David Garrison, Bob Logan and Neil Cole are primary resources. In the fourth wave, as in the New Testament, all energy is invested in disciple-making and no energy is wasted on creating an institutional church or rebuilding the Temple. More aptly named a “disciple multiplication movement,” fourth wave churches begin small, remain small, and continually spin off new small churches rather than grow one larger church. These evangelistic methods could be highly effective in small church contexts.

³²Hurston, *Growing the World's Largest Church*, 19-20.

³³Ibid., 19-20. Cho is the last name; in Korea, the last name would come first, so the pastor's name in Korea would be Cho Yonggi (Hurston, *Growing the World's Largest Church*, 221). Cho later married Jashil Choi's daughter, Grace. Pastor Cho used the western name Paul for many years and now uses David. More recently printed books substitute David for Paul.

as his assistant.³⁴ John Hurston, an Assembly of God missionary, arrived later that summer and began to conduct four daily services in week-long tent crusades in six Korean cities; Yongii Cho served as his interpreter. Miracles of healing and conversion followed.

The church among the poor in Bulkwangdong struggled. The day began at 4:30 a.m. as Cho and Choi beat on an empty gas can to call the faithful to prayer. The rest of the day was spent in home visitation, ministering and praying with any who would allow them. Laity would pray in the tent or join Mrs. Choi and Pastor Cho in ministering visitation. Prayer continued in the tent all day long.³⁵ By 1960 the church had grown to two hundred members, and the Hurston family arrived to help in the work, parking their camper trailer next to the tent. John and Maxine Hurston joined in the pattern of daily early morning prayer followed by day-long ministering visitation. John Hurston wrote: “Rather than have a parade of evangelists and speakers to attract a crowd, we focused on teaching and motivating believers to minister and reach out to others. For that to take place, there had to be a structure of lay leaders. The growing crowd soon became a vibrant congregation.”³⁶ The church soon grew to six hundred members in 1961 and relocated to Sodaemon, where the Assemblies of God constructed a building to house the church which included an auditorium that would seat fifteen hundred.³⁷ Attendance grew to eighteen hundred by 1963.

Cho experienced a physical collapse from overwork in 1964. After much prayer he

³⁴Ibid., 21-22.

³⁵Ibid., 22-24, 27.

³⁶Ibid., 63.

³⁷Ibid., 25-26.

began the cell ministry with women serving as spiritual leaders.³⁸ This new innovation increased the competency of the church despite the virtual non-involvement of the senior pastor for several years. Attendance grew to five thousand by 1966. The church reported eight thousand members and 150 cell groups in 1968. The primary pattern of ministry continued to be worship, prayer, ministry visitation in homes by both clergy and laity, and gathering seekers into cells.³⁹

This fourfold ministry pattern remains true today as the church now serves over 700,000 members. Yongii Cho and a few others provide leadership that sets direction.⁴⁰ Only a relatively few creative leaders are needed for this giant church to function; rather than continually reinventing itself and focusing on planning something new, the majority focus on diligent labor in the harvest. The pastoral staff of 171 ordained pastors, 356 non-ordained pastors and 100,113 lay leaders focus on the implementation of the fourfold ministry pattern.⁴¹ The focus of Yoido Church is not on continual innovation but faithful implementation of the Great Commission of Jesus Christ through the most effective

³⁸Ibid., 28, 82, 83-88. Cf. David Yongii Cho, *Successful Home Cell Groups* (Gainesville, FL: Bridge-Logos, 1981), 4-20. Cho's use of women as spiritual leaders was a radical antithesis to an entrenched cultural discrimination against women in Korea. Mija Sa, "Women in the Korean Church: A Historical Survey," *Reformed World* 45, no. 1, (March 1995), under <http://www.warc.ch/dp/rw9512/04.html> (accessed June 13, 2007).

³⁹Hurston, *Growing the World's Largest Church*, 28-29.

⁴⁰Ibid., 79. The 1319 elders, all men, set policy but are also leaders in service. Statistically, this is microgovernance; elders represent half of 1% of attenders and there is one elder for every 530 members. While 1 in 7 members serves in leadership, their energy is shifted to direct service to Jesus Christ and away from institutional governance through committees. Yoido's leadership focuses on service, not governance. Cf. Bill Easum and Bil Cornelius, *Go Big: Lead Your Church to Explosive Growth* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2006), 19-40, 79-80.

⁴¹The leadership figures are current. Yoido Full Gospel Church, *Organization*; <http://english.fgtv.com/yoido/organi.asp> (accessed June 18, 2007).

discipleship system in the world.⁴²

Yoido's discipleship system is so effective that the church has grown to the point of violating many commonly accepted church growth principles. Yet the world's most efficient discipleship system keeps producing converts and raising them up to exponentially make disciples. As Yoido defines the highest level of adaptive competency in making disciples, what drops away with size is actually inessential. What remains is the core effective activity in making disciples and will work in any size church. Every member at Yoido participates in a fourfold ministry of worship, prayer meeting, ministry visitation (as a visitor or a recipient) and cell. Even the smallest American churches can provide this fourfold ministry pattern.

Common church growth wisdom is based on a prioritization of the proclamation system over a discipleship system approach.⁴³ The priority in proclamation system evangelism is inviting non-Christians to worship. Everything must be subordinated to the comfort and convenience of the seeker so that non-Christians will desire to spend sufficient time in institutional worship services to become converted. This becomes impossible in a church the size of Yoido, where "the average member has to wait at least one hour in a long line just to get a place to sit down in one of our seven services."⁴⁴ It is

⁴²Emergent church theory advises continual innovation and reinvention. McLaren, *Church on the Other Side*, 11-26. Diffusion of innovation theory suggests this would exclude 84% of a given population.

⁴³Church growth principles for a proclamation system based evangelistic approach are well stated by William Easum, *The Church Growth Handbook* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1990), 43-54. These principles remain valid; Easum correctly indicates that improving worship brings immediate, positive results. Contemporary conditions, however, require an effective discipleship system cooperating with God in prevenient and sanctifying grace to bring in the people to worship. Both are necessary, but throughout history it is the discipleship system which has been neglected.

⁴⁴Paul Yonggi Cho with R. Whitney Manzano, *More Than Numbers* (Waco, TX: Word Books, 1984), 50. The facilities have since been expanded.

impossible to accommodate 700,000 Christians in what is considered ideal in the west: a single worship service leaving more than 40% of the seating area unoccupied so that seekers are not crowded or uncomfortable.⁴⁵ The logistics are impossible and as a goal, irrelevant; growth continues despite these negative conditions in worship, proving that common American convictions about worship services and church growth are rendered irrelevant in this ministry context by Yoido's powerful discipleship system. Every week more persons participate in cell than worship, while worship participation dominates participation in the United States.

Seven worship services occur each Sunday, two on Saturday and three on Wednesday.⁴⁶ Yoido worships in a main sanctuary that seats twelve thousand and six chapels in the same building seating another twelve thousand where the service is televised on a giant screen.⁴⁷ Comiskey estimates 133,000 in worship the Sunday he visited in 1997, plus twenty thousand children in Sunday School, for a total attendance at the mother church of 153,000. Twelve other regional chapels add approximately 100,000 for a Sunday total of 253,000.⁴⁸ This Sunday attendance represents 28% of the membership;

⁴⁵For a western visitor's less than enthusiastic experience of Yoido worship, see Harpocrates [pseud.], 254: *Yoido Full Gospel Church, Yoido, Seoul, South Korea*; <http://www.ship-of-fools.com/Mystery/2000/254Mystery.html> (accessed June 18, 2007).

⁴⁶Hurston, *Growing the World's Largest Church*, 13. Dr. Cho preaches at 9 a.m., 11 a.m. and 1 p.m. Sundays, at 2 p.m. on Saturday and 2 p.m. on Wednesday. A video is played of Dr. Cho's sermon is played in the 3 p.m. and 5 p.m. services on Sunday, 5 p.m. on Saturday and 7 p.m. on Wednesday. A guest or staff pastor preaches at 6:30 a.m. and 7 p.m. Sunday, 5 p.m. Wednesday and in two-hour cycles during each all night prayer meeting from 10 p.m. to 4 a.m. Hurston, *Growing the World's Largest Church*, 153.

⁴⁷These estimates are from Joel Comiskey's 1997 visit to Yoido. Comiskey has difficulty with so many Yoido members not attending worship in the church building, but indicates Cho's response is that their tithing indicates a proper level of commitment. Cf. Matthew 6:21. Joel Comiskey, *Yoido Full Gospel Church*, <http://www.joelcomiskeygroup.com/articles/worldwide/yoido.htm> (accessed June 13, 2007).

⁴⁸By 2003 Regional Sanctuaries had increased from twelve to nineteen. Yoido, *Organization*.

Southern Baptist attendance in the United States, without the logistical problems of Yoido's size, reflects 35% of membership.⁴⁹ The worship style at Yoido is traditional rather than contemporary, although large projection screens are used.⁵⁰ By American standards the sanctuary is crowded and uncomfortable, yet the church has grown for years despite this inconvenience and discomfort.

The American concern for ample, convenient parking is irrelevant. In a church of this size it is impossible to provide parking for a hundreds of thousands of attenders. Networks of cells at Yoido charter over a hundred buses; the church itself has no involvement. The ride on a chartered bus to Yoido Church provides a time of cell fellowship to and from the worship center.⁵¹ It is also likely that many use public transportation. Many others no doubt watch the Yoido service on television at home, either with their families or as a cell group; this is more common since 2001 due to live Internet broadcasting on Sunday and Wednesdays.⁵²

With the worship center so crowded, the traditional "altar call" would be impossible. At the proper time in worship, persons wishing to receive Christ as Savior and

⁴⁹Kevin D. Hendricks, "The Case of the Missing Church Members," Church Marketing Sucks Blog, entry posted July 26, 2005, http://www.churchmarketingsucks.com/archives/2005/07/the_case_of_the.html (accessed June 13, 2007).

⁵⁰Southern Baptist Ralph Neighbor wrote in 1990 that Cho's Pentecostal service was "just about as formal as a Presbyterian church." Neighbor, *Where Do We Go*, 150.

⁵¹David Yonggi Cho, *Successful Home Cell Groups* (Gainesville, FL: Bridge-Logos, 1981), 61-62. Cf. Cho, *More Than Numbers*, 53. Elim Church cells charter six hundred city buses to attend worship. Joel Comiskey, "Ten Largest Cell Churches," *Cell Group Journal*, December 2000, <http://joelcomiskeygroup.com/articles/worldwide/tenLargest.htm> (accessed June 13, 2007).

⁵²Hurston, *Growing the World's Largest Church*, 129. The services are broadcast over seven television stations, reaching most of South Korea. For Yoido's early media strategy, see Cho, *More Than Numbers*, 55-71.

Lord stand where they are and participate in a prayer of salvation, surrounded by the cell group members with whom they attend worship.⁵³ Attending worship with the cell as a group ameliorates the seemingly negative conditions of the overcrowded sanctuary and chapels.⁵⁴ The relationships of the cell surround the convert throughout all the stages of grace in the largest church in the world.

Yoido Church is not a program base design church.⁵⁵ The entire church participates in the fourfold ministry pattern of worship, prayer meeting, ministry visitation and cell on weekdays; other ministries are large in number by Western standards but are a minuscule fraction of the total membership at Yoido Church. Fifteen hundred persons participate in twelve adult choirs; each sings in one service a week.⁵⁶ Yoido runs a Sunday school with twenty thousand children in attendance, but this is statistically insignificant compared to the 253,000 present at worship.⁵⁷ Children's cell groups minister to more children on their home turf:

An estimated 70% of the more than twenty-five thousand children involved in these groups come from homes where the parents are not believers. These groups

⁵³Hurston, *Growing the World's Largest Church*, 105, 106. Converts attend a six-week School of Conversion, then are returned to the cell system. Staff, "Breakfast With David Yonggi Cho."

⁵⁴In 2001 Cho spoke of Internet broadcasting to Rick Warren: "Korea is very small - not like in America with a lot of space, so we can't enlarge our church buildings. Besides, every year we have 20,000 new converts in our churches, and we can't put them all in our church building or even our branch churches. So now we have an Internet church and many of the young generation participate in the services at home . . . I say to the young people - don't come to church - just stay home and get your teaching through the Internet." Cho indicates that most of the cells are attending worship via internet broadcasting. Staff, "Breakfast With David Yonggi Cho And Rick Warren," *Rick Warren's Ministry Toolbox*, Issue #17, 7/25/2001, <http://www.pastors.com/RWMT/?ID=17&artid=578&expand=1> (accessed June 13, 2007).

⁵⁵For the original description of the Program Base Design paradigm for the traditional church, see Neighbor, *Where Do We Go*, 38-92.

⁵⁶Hurston, *Growing the World's Largest Church*, 165.

⁵⁷*Ibid.*, 163.

form one of the most evangelistic outreaches of the church. The children themselves do most of the outreach, bringing friends to the teacher's neighborhood home to hear about Jesus.⁵⁸

Leaders develop a great variety of diversified and decentralized non-cell microprogramming ministries that do not become the focus of the entire church because statistically few people participate in them.⁵⁹ The focus remains on evangelism and the fourfold ministry pattern.

Microprogramming vastly enhances differentiation. Yoido has more than twenty outreach fellowships which target different segments of society; cells meet on weekdays and outreach fellowships plan and work on Sundays.⁶⁰ The Farming and Fishing Communities Outreach Fellowship, for example, helps small rural churches. Yoido members will ride a bus to a rural village on Sunday, spend the afternoon in ministry visitation, lead an evangelistic service that evening, and incorporate converts into cells in the host church.⁶¹ This program is another example of the "hedgehog" principle of the Yoido Church, which is the fourfold ministry pattern of worship, prayer meeting, ministry visitation and cell.⁶² Most outreach fellowships are initiated by lay leaders and all are run

⁵⁸Ibid., 91.

⁵⁹The exception, of course, is the cell ministry; 70% of deacons serve as cell leaders. Cf. Hurston, *Growing the World's Largest Church*, 68-69.

⁶⁰Hurston, *Growing the World's Largest Church*, 124-125.

⁶¹Ibid., 126-128. The particular visit described is at the invitation of a woman pastor at a rural Methodist church; the visitation and service helped this small Methodist church to grow in one day from seventy to two hundred members. Teams can return up to twice a year. The outreach is ecumenical with the only requirement that the church be evangelical. The Fellowship provides financial assistance to over five hundred struggling rural churches.

⁶²A Hedgehog principle describes an innovative company's primary focus; it is a concept from Jim Collins, *Good To Great: Why Some Companies Make The Leap ... And Others Don't* (New York: HarperCollins, 2001), 90-119.

by lay leaders; staff do not lead in programming at Yoido. Programs play a minor role; about thirty thousand Yoido members support the outreach fellowships by financial support, and far fewer by participation.⁶³ Korean families, with a six-day work week, are under more time pressure than busy Americans; American objections to cell life usually focus on a lack of time. One cell church principle which could be applied in American churches is to restrict programming and committee meetings to Sunday, the day when most people are available. This would leave the other six days open for relational spiritual growth through the fourfold ministry pattern of the Yoido discipleship system. Perhaps it is time to shift from a program-driven “seven day a week church” to a more traditional implementation of the sabbath focus on one day of church planning and programming.⁶⁴

Prayer services occur each day, and prayer is the most common activity of the church that could be considered a program. There is no training program for prayer or staff person in charge of prayer; no bureaucracy develops to manage the church’s program of prayer. The church simply gathers to pray and learns how to pray by practicing regular prayer.⁶⁵ Morning prayer services at five a.m. have been a custom in Korea since 1907.⁶⁶

⁶³Ibid., 133. This is about 12% of the average worship attendance. A great variety of innovative programming is available at Yoido, but it is diversified and decentralized; people participate where they feel called and gifted. Statistically few people participate in any program, resulting in a large number of small, diverse “microprograms” while all participate in the “hedgehog” fourfold ministry of worship, prayer, ministry visitation and cell. This approach would replace one large youth program with hundreds of small youth cells, all different, all highly differentiated to meet local needs, all lay led, and all meeting in the local neighborhood.

⁶⁴Cf. Lyle Schaller, *The Seven Day a Week Church* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1992).

⁶⁵Hurston, *Growing the World's Largest Church*, 38. “Normally, believing Christians pray thirty to sixty minutes daily.” Paul Yonggi Cho, *Prayer: Key to Revival* (Waco, TX: Word Publishing, 1984), 108, 136, 135.

⁶⁶Hurston, *Growing the World's Largest Church*, 39. Cf. Young-Hoon Lee, “Korean Pentecost: the Great Revival of 1907,” *Asian Journal of Pentecostal Studies* 4, no. 1 (January 2001): 73-83, under <http://www.aps.edu/ajps/01-1/01-1-yhlee.pdf> (accessed June 13, 2007).

They occur Monday through Saturday at Yoido Church.⁶⁷ All-night prayer services began in 1972 and since 1980 occur Sunday through Friday, from ten p.m. to four in the morning.⁶⁸ A special purpose prayer service is held on Tuesdays at 10 a.m. for those desiring to receive the baptism in the Holy Spirit.⁶⁹ The church maintains a retreat site, Prayer Mountain, where there are four prayer services daily.⁷⁰ During home visitation, lay leaders invite non-Christians to the weekly cell meeting, welcome them there, and invite them to go with cell members to one of the many prayer services to pray for God's help for their special needs.⁷¹ In all worship and prayer services, those who desire conversion are asked to stand and are led in a prayer of conversion while they are surrounded by supportive cell members.⁷² Customs such as "Jericho prayer" and "Daniel prayer" guide the faithful in patterns of purposeful prayer.⁷³ Rather than provide programs to meet needs, the primary activity of this church is gathering to pray and ask God to meet needs.

The most successful pattern of evangelism in the world involves no initial

⁶⁷Pastor Cho's description of his schedule indicates that he attends few of these meetings. They are a ministry of his staff and lay leaders, thereby enhancing differentiation, diversity, and leadership growth. Cf. Cho, *Prayer: Key to Revival*, 136-138.

⁶⁸Hurston, *Growing the World's Largest Church*, 40-42. The Wednesday night and Friday night prayer services have the highest attendance, drawing twenty-five thousand. Hurston's research shows that more than half of the cell leaders attend all-night prayer meeting on a weekly basis. Hurston, *Growing the World's Largest Church*, 213. Cf. Cho, *Prayer: Key to Revival*, 111-112.

⁶⁹Hurston, *Growing the World's Largest Church*, 43.

⁷⁰*Ibid.*, 3, 6, 7, 11, 55. Cho indicated when membership was 370,000 in 1984 that on average three thousand people, or almost 1% of members, were praying every day at Prayer Mountain. Cho, *Prayer: Key to Revival*, 108, 136.

⁷¹Hurston, *Growing the World's Largest Church*, 40.

⁷²*Ibid.*, 105, 106.

⁷³*Ibid.*, 47, 48, 39.

participation in worship due to the inconveniences of the size of Yoido Church. New people participate first in the discipleship system, and only later attend worship.⁷⁴ The path to membership begins with a relationship built through ministry visitation followed by an invitation to participate in a friendly small group meeting on the potential convert's home turf and not on an invitation to worship. The basic church growth lesson from the world's largest church is stunning but simple: the most successful path to church growth involves inviting people to small groups which build relationships instead of inviting them to worship.

New people should not be invited to worship but rather to a small group fellowship activity that builds relationships. Persons who become active in a small group will inevitably attend worship with members of that group. Yoido loses no prospective members due to worship visitors slipping through the cracks and wastes no energy on ensuring member assimilation beyond worship involvement. When new converts attend worship for the first time, they are already completely assimilated in the sanctifying grace process of the small group discipleship system. They are not strangers. Groups provide conversations and worship services provide presentations; persuasion toward conversion happens in the midst of Christian conversation prior to attendance at worship.⁷⁵

Standard church growth theory focuses on evangelizing among the existing social networks of church members regardless of geography. Adaptations in the second and third

⁷⁴Cho, *More Than Numbers*, 44-48.

⁷⁵Media and proclamation are only effective at reaching the first 16% of a population; the diffusion of innovations teaches that conversion to Christ beyond this 16%, like any innovation adoption, is the result of multiple conversations between near peers "in the midst of community." Craig Miller, *NextChurch.Now*, 6.

waves of cell churches tend to minimize geographical considerations which are perceived as limiting; cell networks expand without consideration of geographical proximity in order to immediately take advantage of existing relationships.⁷⁶ After initial success, geographic dispersal interferes with opportunities for interaction and the growth rate slows down.⁷⁷

Evangelism at Yoido has an explicit territorial, geographical emphasis.

Geographical districts of cell networks mimic the old parish system. Evangelism focuses on the immediate geographical neighborhood of the cell leader. The Korean term for cell leader is literally *ku-yok jang* which means “leader in one’s small geographical territory or area.” These leaders “have spiritual oversight of a specific area and are responsible to visit participants and reach out to non-Christian neighbors.”⁷⁸ It is westerners, not Yoido Church, who adopted the word “cell group” in order to emphasize cell multiplication.⁷⁹ The cell group identifies needs within the lives of specific people in their micro-mission field and sets goals;⁸⁰ the cell group then visits and prays for and with specific people in their neighborhood. Gift giving, ranging from gifts at special occasions⁸¹ to the personal

⁷⁶Comiskey, *From Twelve to Three*, 11-13. McGavran calls the relational network “the bridges of God” while Neighbor and Arn use the biblical term “*oikos*.” It is also known as the “FRAN Plan” of existing relationships among *Friends, Relatives, Acquaintances* and *Neighbors*. Cf. Bruce D. Tuttle, “FRAN Plan to Help Church Members Share Faith,” *Offering Christ Today*, January-March 2000, under <http://www.gbod.org/evangelism/programs/offeringchrist/fran.html> (accessed June 13, 2007).

⁷⁷For an explanation of why geographically determined networks are preferred, see Randy Frazee, *Connecting Church*, Illinois Great Rivers Conference, United Media Resource Center (Item #103018; CCN Broadcast Date: October 25, 2005), <http://www.intraweb.igrc.org/umrc/> (accessed June 13, 2007).

⁷⁸Hurston, *Growing the World's Largest Church*, 72.

⁷⁹Ibid.

⁸⁰Ibid., 101.

⁸¹Ibid., 74. This is also an expectation within the cell.

delivery of a copy of the weekly church newspaper⁸² and audio tapes,⁸³ is culturally valued and offers a valid reason to visit a non-Christian. Cell groups focus on ministering to their neighbors in micro-mission fields; they solve small, local human problems through building helpful relationships first horizontally between neighbors and then vertically between those neighbors and Jesus Christ.⁸⁴

Christ commanded his followers to love their neighbors. Cells are generally homogenous but begin through ministry visitation among strangers in a micro-mission field. Persons who have been displaced from their former networks of relationships are psychologically ready to form new networks in their new environment. Cells take advantage of this opportunity by inviting displaced persons into their small group community.⁸⁵ Ministry visits make strangers into friends. A focus on existing relationships in one person's *oikos* network soon exhausts the potential of those relationships. The local neighborhood focus in a transient society provides a never-ending stream of potential

⁸²The four page *Full Gospel News* "contains a summary of Dr. Cho's previous Sunday sermon, notes for the upcoming home cell meeting lesson, at least one personal testimony of healing or salvation, and assorted church news." Weekly circulation in 1978 was ten thousand copies; the name was changed to *Full Gospel Family* in 1994. In 1990 the circulation had climbed to 1.4 million copies each week; each week the church gives each staff pastor two thousand copies to distribute through cell leaders. Each copy delivered is an opportunity for conversation. Hurston, *Growing the World's Largest Church*, 103, 218.

⁸³Hurston, *Growing the World's Largest Church*, 100.

⁸⁴Ibid., 104. Yoido's ministry is massively decentralized through the use of cells working in micro-mission fields functioning as geographical and sociological niches. Each cell functions as a local niche for a crossing the chasm diffusion strategy. Cf. Christopher P. Scheitle "Organizational Niches and Religious Markets: Uniting Two Literatures," *Interdisciplinary Journal of Research on Religion* 3, 2007, <http://www.religjournal.com/> (accessed June 12, 2007).

⁸⁵For a discussion of people movements and ministry to displaced persons, see Craig Miller, *NextChurch.Now*, 37-54. Individuals approaching individuals as geographical neighbors overcomes racial, ethnic, and class barriers according to Malcolm Gladwell, *The Tipping Point: How Little Things Can Make A Big Difference* (New York: Little, Brown & Co., 2002), 35. Cf. Rodney Stark, *Cities of God: The Real Story of How Christianity Became an Urban Movement and Conquered Rome* (New York: HarperSanFrancisco, 2006), 8-13.

converts as cell leaders build increasing relational influence in their neighborhoods.

Persons are assimilated into the discipleship system by home ministry visitation prior to becoming Christians or even attending the cell. Participation in the cell is the outcome of visitation. When the person finally visits the cell, he or she is not a stranger. The focus in neighborhood visitation is on ministry to the simple needs of individuals, not the insoluble problems of the community as a whole.

Visitation focuses on building relationships that solve human problems, in prayer, and in ways that help each person directly:⁸⁶

Okja found something else that helped in bringing people to the Savior: “When I talked with these people we had targeted to evangelize,” she said, “I discovered one thing. If a person ever told me of a need or problem, it let me know that person was receptive. It never failed that I could then lead that person to faith in Jesus Christ.”

The ultimate aim of evangelistic visitation is to find people with needs and problems and then lead them to the Problem Solver, Jesus Christ. A subdistrict leader, Leebu Pak, tells her cell leaders, “Look for problems. When you find someone with a problem, you are almost guaranteed that person will come to Jesus.”⁸⁷

Far more time in ministry is spent upon personal visitation than upon preparing for the cell meeting event. The focus of cell leaders and staff pastors is upon ministering directly to troubled persons face to face on their own turf.⁸⁸ Cell leaders, section leaders, deacons and deaconesses, staff pastors and elders spend many more hours in personal visitation than in cell meetings, both in visitation of the lost and visitation of cell leaders and church members who are struggling.

⁸⁶Hurston, *Growing the World's Largest Church*, 99-100.

⁸⁷Ibid., 104.

⁸⁸Karen Hurston, “A Day in the Life of a Staff Pastor: A Study in Contrasts,” *Church Growth Today* 9, no. 3, under http://www.hurstonministries.org/art_c_05.htm (accessed June 18, 2007).

Visitation is an old, traditional ministry discipline. Yet a church member in the world's largest church of 700,000 members receives more pastoral visitation than parish churches in America. Staff pastors at Yoido watching over an average of two thousand members do more prayer and personal visitation than a full-time pastor in America watching over one hundred church attenders.⁸⁹ It is not that laity take up all the other administration and programming; there is no such comparative programming or endless committee meetings to interfere with ministry visitation.

Ministry visits are not social calls nor do they focus on friendships. Ministry visits target specific needs in specific people which the cell seeks to resolve by many personal visits on seeker turf, prayer and signs of caring. Ministry visits begin the spiritual mentoring process in a hierarchy of involvement as cell members, cell leader, section leader, senior deacon or deaconess and staff pastor all visit the seeker in teams, one after another, in order to pray over the seeker's difficulty. When the problem resolves, the responsibility for success is assigned to Jesus Christ the problem solver. If the problem worsens, the caring solidarity of the visitation increases and the person feels loving support in the isolation of his or her suffering, as in, "When I was in greatest need, it was the Christians who came to me."

American small groups and cells have a tendency to develop a super competent

⁸⁹"While the average cell leader prays for one hour daily, the typical staff pastor prays for at least two hours. While the average cell leader makes three to five prayer visits a week, the typical staff pastor makes ninety-one prayer visits each month. More than seven hundred full-time pastoral staff members start their days five mornings a week in prayer and reporting, then spend eight hour days making prayer visits to leaders and members, always accompanied by at least one lay leader." Karen Hurston, "The Small Groups Behind the World's Largest Church," *Strategies for Today's Leader* 36, no. 2, (Spring 1999): 15-17, under http://www.hurstonministries.org/art_c_03.htm (accessed June 13, 2007).

leader who “does it all” surrounded by dependent, seemingly incompetent learners. This take charge “CEO” cell leader overfunctions in the cell event rather than equipping the others to discover and practice their ministries. Task oriented “hero” leaders in America can consolidate power around themselves and focus group members on self-enrichment rather than ministry to one another and to persons outside the cell. Overfunctioning leaders inhibit differentiation and further dependency and enmeshment.⁹⁰

In Pentecostal teaching, all Christians are spiritually gifted and expected to use their gifts in the cells. As the group shares, all persons are able to use their gifts for the common good of the cell (1 Corinthians 12:7). Need calls forth transitory leadership roles in the normal functioning of the group and members rise to flexibly fulfill the leadership need of the occasion.⁹¹ The cell leader at Yoido, normally someone with the gift of evangelism, keeps the group focused on relationships that win souls. A person with teaching gifts does not need to be “the” leader to use these gifts in a cell. Leadership tasks in Korean cells rotate, as does the location of the cell meeting; this gently hinders domination by a leader and prevents volunteer burn-out. The first roles of leadership experienced by persons participating in Yoido Church are that of presider and prayer captain at a cell meeting; these roles rotate from person to person in the cell meeting and

⁹⁰M. Scott Peck, *The Different Drum: Community Making and Peace* (New York: Touchstone, 1987), 115-119. For more on overfunctioning, see Edwin H. Friedman, *Generation to Generation: Family Process in Church and Synagogue* (New York: The Guilford Press, 1985), 21-23, 42, 47-50, 79, 142. For more on the problem of “hero leaders,” see Peter M. Senge et al., *The Dance of Change: The Challenges to Sustaining Momentum in Learning Organizations* (New York: Doubleday, 1999), 10-21.

⁹¹Dan R. Dick describes the importance of these flexible roles in *Leaderships*, http://www.gbod.org/congregational/articles.asp?act=reader&item_id=2471 (accessed June 13, 2007). Peck calls this the “flow of leadership in community.” Peck, *The Different Drum*, 72-73.

are even filled by non-Christians.⁹² Talents normally considered as leadership gifts can be a hindrance in cells if they prevent others from experimenting with different roles and discovering their callings to ministry.

Conversion growth at Yoido Church is not uniform. Half of the cell leaders in one survey by Hurston reported no conversions in the previous year, while others reported from one to twenty-three; some groups, then, primarily provide pastoral care to their members.⁹³ If the cell is left without the presence of an evangelistically gifted person, they are less likely to be successful in reaching out, but eventually growth will resume when an evangelistically gifted person is converted. Many section leaders over three to eight cells report conversions of over one hundred families in their section. Hurston reports one section in 1983 leading over three hundred families to Christ and church membership.⁹⁴

Yoido prefers that cell leaders have the gift of evangelism.⁹⁵ Apprentice leaders are not named until the group has grown large enough to divide. That growth, arguably, is the result of the presence of an evangelistically gifted person in the cell who will assume leadership of the new cell.⁹⁶ At Yoido, each convert enters the cell network through the

⁹²Hurston, *Growing the World's Largest Church*, 64.

⁹³Ibid., 218, 73. This was a random sample of 340 cell leaders from eight districts.

⁹⁴Ibid., 218. Cf. 101-102.

⁹⁵Joel Comiskey is the authority on the second wave of cell church development which strongly believes that every person has the ability to start and lead a cell; Comiskey reports Cho's preference for cell leaders to have the gift of evangelism in Joel Comiskey, *Leadership Issues of Cell Based Ministries*, <http://www.joelcomiskeygroup.com/articles/tutorials/leadership.html> (accessed June 13, 2007). This is a signature philosophical difference between the first and second waves of cell churches.

C. Peter Wagner estimates that 5-10% of church members have the spiritual gift of evangelism. Schwarz, *Natural Church Development*, 34-35.

⁹⁶Delaying the naming of an apprentice until growth fills the cell demonstrates the presence of one or more evangelistically gifted persons and helps ensure such a gifted person will lead the new cell.

influence of a person with the gift of evangelism within that cell.⁹⁷

The focus of the Yoido cell group is on winning souls, not upon growing to a size for multiplication. An apprentice leader is not appointed until the group reaches fifteen or more in attendance.⁹⁸ Converts who are won to Christ by the apprentice leader (while a cell member) often become the nucleus of a new, aggressively evangelistic cell.⁹⁹ Or a cell leader might be assigned to two or more geographically proximate members to form a new cell and do ministry visitation. When possible, natural networks are the basis for dividing groups; when there are no natural networks, geography is the basis.¹⁰⁰

Yoido staff pastors begin their work day with an hour or more of prayer and spend the remainder of their time in ministry visitation accompanied by their lay leaders.¹⁰¹ While classes are available, the majority of lay training is done in demonstration, modeling and coaching rather than through training programs. Lay leaders continue to visit on their own during the week, building evangelistic community with non-Christians and strengthening the relational network with Christians. Staff focus on equipping laity for this ministry through modeling.

⁹⁷In order to multiply cells every six months, Neighbor advises beginning cells with an apprentice (shepherd intern) already in place. Neighbor, *Where Do We Go*, 271. This approach can result in cells multiplying so rapidly that no person in the new cell has the gift of evangelism, at which point conversion growth slows. When cells are filled from worship overflow, as is common in the second and third waves, achieving true community is more difficult because the people are disconnected as they enter the cell. New cell leaders are often immature. The purpose of the cell often can shift to the spiritual growth of internal cell members and the focus on evangelism can be lost or diminished when no one has the gift of evangelism.

⁹⁸Hurston, *Growing the World's Largest Church*, 88, 72.

⁹⁹Ibid., 93.

¹⁰⁰Ibid.

¹⁰¹Ibid., 13, 37, 63, 220. Cf. Hurston, "A Day in the Life."

During the annual Grand Home Visitation, staff pastors systematically visit all 700,000 members in their homes or businesses in a three-month period.¹⁰² A typical staff pastor works with up to fifteen section leaders, one hundred cell group leaders and two thousand church members.¹⁰³ The typical staff pastor is a married woman between the ages of thirty-five and forty-four, has children, has been a Christian for sixteen to twenty years and has attended the church between ten and fourteen years.¹⁰⁴ Yoido does not rapidly bring laity into leadership or on staff. The 700,000 members of Yoido Church receive significantly more direct pastoral visitation than members of small American churches in the parish system, and far more visitation from laity who are neighbors. These carefully nurtured relationships bring people into cells and from cells into the church.

The world's largest church is a natural outcome of the world's most effective discipleship system. The next step is to consider what can be learned from this discipleship system. Resistance to change will also develop with any significant alternation in the status quo. Along with other improvements, factors which help overcome resistance to change also need to be incorporated in discipleship systems if the Great Commission is to shape the behavior of disciples in our churches. The discipleship system of Yoido Church is a model that is effective at making disciples while overcoming systemic resistance to change.

¹⁰²A typical staff pastor will visit three hundred homes during the Grand Home Visitation, averaging ten homes per day. Hurston, *Growing the World's Largest Church*, 117, 219.

¹⁰³Hurston, *Growing the World's Largest Church*, 219-220.

¹⁰⁴Ibid., 219. For more information on the decision to use women in ministry, see Hurston, *Growing the World's Largest Church*, 83-88.