

A note to the reader:

This paper proposes a hypothetical solution to problems perceived by the author in the Illinois Great Rivers Conference of the United Methodist Church.

The paper represents the thoughts of the author, not the Office of Congregational Development of that conference, nor of any Conference personnel.

While the author hopes that the proposal will be implemented, the reader should not assume that in its present form it has the approval or endorsement of any official or committee of the Illinois Great Rivers Annual Conference.

This consideration lies in the future.

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INTRODUCTION

In the beginning, west of Eden, humanity began to fulfill the command of God: “be fruitful and multiply.”¹ God’s creation is continually fruitful in a continually changing environment. To adapt and be fruitful is natural to all creation.

In the beginning, north of Calvary, the disciples began to fulfill the command of Jesus Christ to be fruitful and multiply:

And Jesus came and said to them, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, to the close of the age"

(Matthew 28:18-20).

In the following twenty centuries the pace of change has accelerated as the population of the world has increased. Each new generation of Christians has flourished relative to their obedience to everything that Jesus commanded. The foundational principle of church growth is “Thy will be done” (Matthew 6:10). As Donald McGavran said, “It is God’s will that his Church grow, that

¹Genesis 1:28. Cf. Genesis 8:15-17. All quotations of the Bible are from the Revised Standard Version of the Bible, copyright 1952 [2nd edition, 1971] by the Division of Christian Education of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the United States of America. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

his lost children are found.”² The Great Commission is more than a principle; it is a pattern for the Church of Jesus Christ to obediently practice in order to fulfill God’s will to be fruitful and multiply.

Mainline Decline and Third World Cell Church Growth

There is a problem in the Church of Jesus Christ in the United States of America. Scientific pollster George Gallup stated that “North America is the only continent where Christianity is not growing.”³ John and Sylvia Ronsvalle discovered clear trends from 1968-1993 in giving and membership data in twenty-nine mainline denominations; if nothing changes, giving will entirely cease by 2032 and church membership “will fall to zero percent of the U.S. population in less than one hundred years.”⁴ United Methodist church growth expert George Hunter, III, considered America in 1998 to be the fourth largest mission field in the world.⁵ There is no county within the United States where the percentage of church attendance is higher than ten years ago.⁶ Some growth in American churches is deceptive, as between 70-90% of new members are received from other churches. This is not church growth, but the accelerated decline

²Win Arn, “The Donald McGavran I Knew,” *Ministry Advantage* 7, no. 4:6.

³Mission Spokane, “Why We Need to Plant New Churches . . . Nationwide,” *Mission Spokane*, <http://www.mission Spokane.org/needplant.html> (accessed June 12, 2007). Cf. Gene Wood, *Leading Turnaround Churches* (St. Charles, IL: ChurchSmart Resources, 2001), 34.

⁴Merton P. Strommen, *The Innovative Church: Seven Steps to Positive Change in Your Congregation* (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Fortress, 1997), 80. For more information on research by the Ronsvalles, see *empty tomb, inc.*, <http://www.emptytomb.org/> (accessed June 12, 2007).

⁵George Hunter, quoted in David J. Gyertson, “Ministry in the New Millennium,” *Ministry Magazine*, (September 1998).

⁶David Garrison, *Church Planting Movements: How God Is Redeeming a Lost World* (Midlothian, VA: WIGTake Resources, 2004), 160.

of other churches to the benefit of the receptor church.⁷ The basic problem facing the United Methodist Church today, as well as many historically influential denominations, is a failure of the majority of churches to thrive; a systemic homeostasis of not making disciples has become normative within the traditional church.⁸ Chapter 1 will examine the ministry context of the Illinois Great Rivers Conference and thoroughly identify four systemic problems in historical and contemporary context.

Other churches in the world, plus a few bright spots in America, show a great contrast. Most are cell churches, and many of the remaining are transforming themselves into cell or cell-type churches. Nineteen out of the twenty largest churches in the world are cell churches.⁹ Seoul, Korea is home to the world's largest Pentecostal church, the Yoido Full Gospel Church; the world's largest Presbyterian church, Young Nak; the world's largest Baptist church, Sung Rak; and the world's largest Methodist church, Kwang Lim.¹⁰ All are based on cells. Yoido Church is continually spinning off church plants¹¹ yet continues to grow to more than 700,000 members.¹²

⁷Carl F. George, *The Coming Church Revolution: Empowering Leaders for the Future* (Grand Rapids: Fleming H. Revell, 1994), 37-38.

⁸Cf. Steven J. Goodwin, *Catching the Next Wave: Leadership Strategies for Turn-Around Congregations* (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Fortress, 1999), 17-31.

⁹Ralph W. Neighbour, Jr., *Where Do We Go From Here? A Guidebook for the Cell Group Church*, 10th Anniversary ed. (Houston: Touch Publications, 1990), 37.

¹⁰Ed Lindgren, *Dr. Cho's Secret Weapon: Women*, <http://www.jesuscenter.net/DP-BookCh3.html> (accessed June 12, 2007). Cf. Joel Comiskey, "The Ten Largest Cell Churches in the World" *Cell Group Journal* 10, no. 1 (December, 2000) under <http://www.joelcomiskeygroup.com/articles/worldwide/tenLargest.htm> (accessed June 12, 2007). Kwang Lim is now reported to have 85,000 members. Sandy Zeigler, "What's The Secret?" *Covenant Discipleship Quarterly*, Fall 2004, under <http://www.gbod.org/smallgroup/covenant/fall04/secret.html> (accessed June 12, 2007).

¹¹Neighbour, *Where Do We Go*, 41. Cf. C. Peter Wagner, *Church Planting for a Greater Harvest* (Ventura, CA: Regal Books, 1990), 62.

¹²Yoido Full Gospel Church, "The Church at Yoido," *Yoido Full Gospel Church*, <http://english.fgtv.com/yoido/history2.asp> (accessed May 1, 2007). Figures reported for Yoido's membership vary; 700,000 is the number they quote. For a critique of membership and worship attendance figures, see Joel Comiskey,

These thriving churches exhibit a homeostasis that makes disciples.

In South America, the Elim Church in El Salvador used the Yoido system, known as the "5x5" model, to build a church of 130,000 members in 1999.¹³ The International Charismatic Mission (ICM) of Bogota, Columbia, grew from eight members in 1983 to 24,000 in cell groups by 1998 using their "G12" system.¹⁴ ICM was reported in 2000 as having fifty thousand people attending four weekly weekend services and approximately 150,000 people attending twenty thousand weekly cell groups.¹⁵ Having more people in weekly cell meetings than in worship is a characteristic of these large churches.

Dale Galloway used the Yoido 5x5 system to build New Hope Community Church of Portland, Oregon, to more than five thousand persons in cells by 1990.¹⁶ Bethany World Prayer Center, near Baton Rouge, Louisiana, was inspired by the Elim Church 5x5 system and had a net growth of six hundred families in 1993, their first year of cell ministry. In four years they had gained a net growth of two thousand families.¹⁷ Willow Creek Community Church in suburban

Yoido Full Gospel Church, <http://www.joelcomiskeygroup.com/articles/worldwide/yoido.htm> (accessed June 12, 2007).

¹³Billy Hornsby, *The Cell Driven Church: Bringing in The Harvest* (Mansfield, PA: Kingdom Publishing, 2000), 12-16. Larry Stockstill, *The Cell Church: Preparing Your Church For The Coming Harvest* (Ventura, CA: Regal Books, 1998), 20-22, 44, reports 50,000 members at Elim in 1993. Cf. Joel Comiskey, *Passion and Persistence: How the Elim Church's Cell Groups Penetrated an Entire City for Jesus* (Houston: Cell Group Resources, 2004).

¹⁴Joel Comiskey, *Reap the Harvest* (Houston: Touch Publications, 1999), 43.

¹⁵Joel Comiskey, "Ten Largest Cell Churches." The International Charismatic Mission's web site is available in Spanish at <http://www.mci12.com/> (accessed June 12, 2007).

¹⁶Elmer Towns, *An Inside Look at 10 of Today's Most Innovative Churches: What They're Doing, How They're Doing It & How You Can Apply Their Ideas in Your Church* (Ventura, CA: Regal Books, 1990), 35-41. Cf. Dale E. Galloway, *20/20 Vision: How to Create a Successful Church* (Portland, OR: Scott Publishing Co., 1986). Cf. William Easum, *Dancing With Dinosaurs: Ministry in a Hostile and Hurting World* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1993), 62-66.

¹⁷Larry Stockstill, *Cell Church*, 22. Bethany is now the primary proponent of the G12 system in the United States. Cf. Bethany Cell Church Network, *BCCN: The Bethany Cell Church Network*, <http://www.bccn.com/>

Chicago is transforming itself to a modified metachurch model of using small groups to provide community in their congregation of more than twenty thousand.¹⁸ Ginghamburg United Methodist Church of rural Dayton, Ohio, grew from an attendance of ninety in 1979 to a congregation in 2006 of more than four thousand in weekly attendance.¹⁹ It is still located on a rural county road miles from any large population center and has utilized a cell driven approach since the early days under Pastor Michael Slaughter.²⁰ Chapter 2 will describe effective discipleship systems with specific examples from Yoido Full Gospel Church, the world's largest cell church with over 700,000 members.

These churches thrive because at the core of all they do is a passionate obedience to the Great Commission of Jesus Christ as the highest priority of the local church. Every member without exception is expected to be directly involved in the making of new disciples and is fully supported in that task by the church's organizational structure. Churches fail to thrive when the Great Commission is not the central priority. A discipleship system which nurtures disciples

(accessed June 12, 2007).

¹⁸Willow Creek struggled with a variety of small group formats to effectively provide discipleship care to so many converts, finally settling on what Hybels refers to as a "modified Metachurch" model. Christine M. Anderson, "Life Together: Reclaiming the Ministry of Small Groups" in *Equipping the Saints: Mobilizing Laity for Ministry*, ed. Michael J. Christensen with Carl E. Savage (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2000), 55. Cf. Paul Braoudakis, ed. *Willow Creek Community Church Church Leaders Handbook* (Barrington, IL: The Willow Creek Association, 1997), 115. For metachurch information, see Carl George, *The Coming Church Revolution* (Grand Rapids, MI: Fleming H. Revell, 1994), 59, 124. For the conversion to small groups, see Bill Donahue, "Releasing Community in Small Groups," *The Pastor's Update* 80, no. 7019 (Pasadena, CA: Fuller Theological Seminary, 1998). Donahue states that Willow Creek's shift to a better system of managing small groups and a goal that all members participate was accompanied by a reallocation of 25% of their budget toward this purpose.

¹⁹Michael Slaughter, *Spiritual Entrepreneurs: Six Principles for Risking Renewal* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1996), 14-15, 72-75, 122-123, 131-134. Weekly participation in 2006 averages over four thousand with seven weekend worship services. Cf. *Ginghamburg Key Staff Directory: Mike Slaughter*, http://ginghamburg.org/staff/?tx_wecstaffdirectory_pi1%5Bcurstaff%5D=83 (accessed June 18, 2007).

²⁰Ginghamburg does their own version of cell; cf. Easum, *Dancing With Dinosaurs*, 66-69. For a more traditional application of cell principles in a United Methodist context, cf. Steve Cordle, *Church In Many Houses: Reaching Your Community Through Cell-Based Ministry* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2005).

during the stages of prevenient and sanctifying grace would address this failure to thrive.²¹ The Diagnosis Seminar, the first of three, will explain the basics of a cell church discipleship system for the ministry context and provide templates to clarify, classify and diagnose current reality for disciple-making.²²

Overcoming Resistance to Change in Cultural Contexts

Viewing church growth from an organic systems perspective allows a clearer understanding of why third world cell churches grow rapidly. It is not a cultural oddity or an environmental factor.²³ Cell churches have successfully transcended systemic limits to growth. Systems resist change, and growth is a change. Through obedience to Christ's ancient pattern of disciple-making, cell churches have learned to thrive and surpass systemic limits to church growth in an environment where the typical church averages fifty members. These natural factors also limit change and growth in churches in Illinois. This project proposes that the growth of cell churches has as much to do with overcoming resistance to change as with innovative methods of evangelism. The Dialogue Seminar, the second of three in this project, will describe insights on systems from Peter Senge blended with the "diffusion of innovations" approach of Everett Rogers and Geoffrey Moore. These principles can be incorporated into a discipleship system that overcomes resistance to change as it makes disciples.

²¹*Failure to thrive* is fundamentally understood as a developmental problem caused by neglect of nurturance after birth. A failure to thrive is a failure to developmentally mature.

²²An example of a template would be the lines representing states, counties or highways that overlay weather satellite photos or Doppler radar; the template is not a part of the data, nor does it change or interact with the data, but reveals important aspects of the data.

²³Neighbour, *Where Do We Go*, 41.

Three causes for systemic resistance derived from Peter Senge's *Limits to Growth* systems archetype are (1) pushing the trend, (2) the thermostat correction and (3) the competency limit.²⁴ The latter is derived from Heylighen's Generalized Peter Principle, which states that "in evolution systems tend to develop up to the limit of their adaptive competence."²⁵ Ultimately, any church can grow only to the limit of its competence; cell churches fundamentally grow because their discipleship system raises the competence of each participant to fulfill the Great Commission. They overcome resistance to effectively make disciples who make disciples who make disciples. The Decision Seminar, the last of three in this project, will present simple components to build a viable, relational, developmental, evangelistic discipleship system suitable for the majority of local churches within the Illinois Great Rivers Conference of the United Methodist Church.

The focus of this project is to raise the adaptive competence of the majority of churches in the Illinois Great Rivers Conference through a widespread, productive understanding of cell church growth principles. Innovative change is first information, then a choice, and finally a changed behavior; learning is the essence of innovation adoption. The diffusion of innovations is a process of learning which overcomes resistance to change.²⁶ Diffusion is defined as "the process by which an *innovation* is *communicated* through certain *channels* over *time* among the

²⁴Peter 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.

²⁵Francis 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 12, 2007).

²⁶Everett Rogers, *Diffusion of Innovations*, 4th ed. (New York: Free Press, 1995). Geoffrey Moore, *Crossing the Chasm: Marketing and Selling High-Tech Products to Mainstream Customers*, Rev. ed. (New York: Collins, 2002). As a means of indicating the importance of Rogers' work, Dr. Singhal stated: "The Diffusion of Innovations book, now in its fourth edition, is today the second most cited book in the social sciences. Perhaps someday soon it will be in first place." Arvind Singhal, *Introducing Professor Everett M. Rogers, 47th Annual Research Lecturer, University of New Mexico*, <http://www.unm.edu/~cjdept/department/news1.html> (accessed June 12, 2007).

members of a *social system*.”²⁷ Learning precedes transformation, and a strategy for innovation begins with strategies for learning.

Change must begin with “Innovators” and move through each diffusion framework category in order. *Understanding by Design*, a book by authors Grant P. Wiggins and Jay McTighe, is uniquely suited as a learning process to interest and involve “Innovators” and “Early Adopters.”²⁸ The Training Manual is specifically designed to intrigue and challenge these creative individuals who are the target audience for this project. Jesus was a teacher; the Great Commission commands followers of Jesus to be teachers as well. Chapter 3 addresses the basics of a diffusion of innovations strategy, *Understanding by Design* as a pedagogical model and the design, implementation and assessment strategy for the project.

²⁷Rogers, *Diffusion of Innovations*, 10. Emphasis in original.

²⁸Grant P. Wiggins and Jay McTighe, *Understanding by Design* (Alexandria, VA: Association for Supervision & Curriculum Development, 1998).