

Unit 3: The Second Wave: South American Innovations Lecture: Discipleship Systems

RH: Joel Comiskey, *Reap the Harvest: How A Small Group System Can Grow Your Church* (Houston, TX: Touch Publications, 1999)

CC: Larry Stockstill, *The Cell Church: Preparing Your Church for the Coming Harvest* (Ventura, CA: Regal Books, 1998)

The cell church began at Yoido and then was interpreted worldwide in two variants: the pure cell church and the metachurch. Cell churches in South America adopted the cell innovation and revised it for their cultural background with great success. I believe these modifications are a new, or second wave of cell innovation.

Joel Comiskey's book, *Reap the Harvest*, is my favorite description of the **discipleship system** in these churches, while Comiskey's *Leadership Explosion* is the best book on the use of equipping tracks for training a **healthy core group**. Two books by Larry Stockstill and Billy Hornsby discuss the implementation of these principles in our example church for Unit 4, Bethany World Prayer Center near Baton Rouge, Louisiana. Bethany was originally inspired by the Elim Church 5x5 cell management structure and had a net growth of 600 families in 1993, their first year of cell ministry. Net growth had been flat for 1990-92, so they know that the increase is due to the transition to cell. In 1993-1996 they had gained a net growth of 2000 families (CC: 22). In 2002 their goal is to plant 500 indigenous churches in Third World countries. Bethany is now the primary proponent of the second wave *G12 management structure* in the United States.¹

Joel Comiskey identifies sixteen principles "fundamental to developing a strong cell system" (RH 46-56). Chapters in *Reap The Harvest* expand on each principle. These principles provide a good summary of the second wave of cell innovation.

1. Dependence on Jesus Christ Through Prayer. Prayer is not just talked about but consistently practiced. ICM pastor Cesar Castellanos declares, "Copying our system without the power of the Holy Spirit through prayer is like buying a car without a motor."

2. Motivation for Ministry Is Evangelism and Church Growth. In South America, the Elim Church in El Salvador used the Yoido cell management structure, known as the 5x5 model, to build a church of 130,000 members in 1999. Note the fivefold purpose of the Elim Church memorized by every member:

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.* (CC: 53)

These churches made plans to conquer cities for Christ ... and their cell system makes this possible. The central focus of the cell is always evangelism and multiplication.

¹ For a comparison of the 5x5 and G12 model, see the article by Ralph W. Neighbour, Jr. "Structuring Your Church for Growth - An Examination of Three Cell Structures" in the Workshop Materials section of this unit.

3. Multiplication Is the Goal of Each Cell Group. “Cells in the churches I studied were expected to multiply over and over, using the ever expanding web of members’ relationships. Sixty percent of the 700 leaders who answered my survey had multiplied at least once” (RH: 49).

4. Designed for Reproducible Quality Control. Quality Control means that all cell groups maintain similar components or characteristics (RH: 49). Standardization brings consistent quality, and allows franchises like McDonald’s to train inexperienced high school students to consistently excellent performance.

5. Emphasis on Goal Setting. The “goal of each cell in these churches is always evangelism that results in multiplication.” There is no subtlety or hidden agendas; the major quantitative goal is the number of new cells to be formed. The International Charismatic Mission of Bogota, Columbia, has grown from eight members in 1983 to 24,000 in cell groups by 1998 using their G12 cell management structure and was reported in 2002 as having 300,000 participants. Highly visible banners on the front wall of the church proclaim the specific number of new cells which are the churches goal. ICM pastor Cesar Castellanos declares “All of the growth we’ve obtained thus far has come by focusing on specific goals” (RH: 50).

6. Cell Ministry Is the Church’s Backbone. The cell is the priority ministry of the church with the goal of participation in cell by every member. Other programs are not allowed to compete with the cell ministry; all scheduling is done so as not to interfere with cells.

7. Importance of Both Cell and Celebration. *A Faith Community links worship with a discipleship system.* Churches in the second wave offer *multiple opportunities* to gather and experience community in small and large groups. These gatherings occur in both “wings” and without conflict; they include weekly worship in an overcrowded facility to occasional gigantic rallies in stadiums filled to capacity. In the small group wing, community is experienced in the cell and also a variety of other small groups and weekend retreats. This differentiates the cell church movement from the house church movement.

8. Senior Pastor’s Strong Visionary Leadership. The willingness to fully follow instructions flows from a great respect and willingness to follow that is earned by a strong senior pastor. They dream inspiring visions and clearly communicate them. “The active leadership of the head pastor in the direction of the cell ministry is a clear distinguishing mark in the cell church. Cho declares, ‘The pastor must be the key person involved. Without the pastor, the system will not hold together. It is a system, and a system must have a control point. The controlling factor in home cell groups is the pastor.’ ... The direction of cell ministry cannot be delegated to someone else” (RH: 52). The focus of the pastor, therefore, is upon the cell system.

9. Established Leadership Requirements. Requirements control who is allowed to lead; common requirements are salvation, water baptism, cell attendance, tithing, completion of training and faithful participation in church. Pentecostals normally require “baptism in the Holy Spirit.”

10. Required Leadership Training.

The key theme of the second wave church is that everyone can become a cell leader. Equipping tracks aim to rapidly mature new believers to serve as cell leaders, often within one year. Four aspects of

training are common: training to lead a cell, an apprenticeship where training begins within the cell, a Jethro system where leaders are individually mentored and ongoing training on a weekly, bimonthly or monthly basis.

11. Leadership Developed Within the Church. All leadership positions, including the senior pastor, are developed from within; in this way the strengths and weaknesses of a leader are already known before a position is filled.

12. A “Jethro Model” Care Structure. The Jethro model is the advice given to Moses to care for the individual needs of the people of Israel in Exodus 18.

The key is “moving people into relationship and oversight” (CC: 24)

13. Leadership Promotion Based on Success. Only proven success produces the confident respect needed for leaders to follow directions consistently. The mission to reach the lost is so important that leaders who do not perform are ultimately removed if they do not perform.

14. Cell Groups Meet in Homes. Homes are the primary meeting places for cell groups; the temple, however, is fully utilized in leadership training. (The first modification that any traditional church wishes to make is to move small group meetings from homes to churches; cells need to be visible in the neighborhoods where the lost people are located.)

15. Cells Follow-up with Visitors, New Converts. While visitors to worship are consistently there due to some relationship with someone in the church, these churches fill cells with worship visitors as well as through direct evangelism. Cell members follow up so that the resulting relationships draw the worship visitor into cell life. At Bethany, new converts are brought to one of seven district offices based on their zip code to meet their district pastor and view a short video on cell life. A staff pastor and cell leader call on them within 24 hours.

16. Cell Lessons Based on Pastor’s Sermon. To ensure continuity and consistency, and to strengthen the link between cell and celebration, cell lessons are always based on the senior pastor’s preaching. Cells are not allowed to choose other curriculum. Their purpose is to obediently serve to reach the lost and multiply, not to pursue their own individual needs.