

“The Pure Cell Model Compared with the Metachurch Model” by Joel Comiskey¹
(Statistics are from 1996 when this tutorial was written.)

The Pure Cell Model

The one who has written the most extensively on the Pure Cell Model is Ralph Neighbour (1990). He also seems to have done the most research on cell-based churches worldwide, thus increasing the reliability of his studies. His writings are not only based on the careful study of cell ministry, but also on many years of personal experience. Here’s how he describes pure cell ministry,

“One of the greatest struggles of those wishing to make the transition from P.B.D. [Program Based Design] church life involves this shift in thinking: the cell is the church, and the church is the cell. It is the basic building block of the larger community called ‘local church’. There must be no competition with it—none at all. Everything in the city-wide structure must exist for the cells, be operated by the cells, and must strengthen the life of the cells. As in the human body, the life of the church is in the cells. Are people to be reached for Christ? It is done through cells. Are people to be built up in Him? It is to be done through cells. Are children to be nurtured? They are to be exposed from the start to the cell as normal church life. There are no Specialists and there are no programs in the cell group church” (1990:68,69).

This concept of the cell being the church and the church being the cell permeates all of Ralph Neighbour’s teaching and writing. He views the cell church as ushering in the second reformation (1990:6,7). When reading Neighbour, you get the impression that you should be either totally committed to the Pure Cell Model or you are against it by remaining in the traditional church structure. There is no middle ground.

Although it seems to me that Dr. Neighbour tends to be overly dogmatic, there is no doubt that he is the premier expert on the cell church worldwide (note 26). Yet, what is this Pure Cell Model? What are the distinguishing features? Here I will list some of the key principles in a simplified format. Later in my case study of Bethany World Prayer Center (a pure cell church), I will be describing many of these facets in much greater detail.

Cells Form Part of the Local Church Structure

In the pure cell church, cells are not isolated units. They are not individual, unconnected mini-churches. Rather, they are intimately linked to the life of local church body. Those who attend the cell groups are expected to attend the church. Those who attend the church are expected to attend the cell groups. This is precisely the model that is used in Korea. In referring to Cho’s model, Hadaway states,

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Members of Cho’s home cell groups are also expected to attend the meetings on a regular basis. Attendance is not taken lightly, and when a member is unexpectedly absent from a cell group meeting, the house church leader contacts the absentee person the following day to learn why”(1987:99).

Cho own words are helpful here,

The local church is the strength of Christianity. Home cell groups contribute to that strength. Anything that dilutes the strength of the local church is to be avoided. That includes some of the parachurch ministries that sometimes take money and commitment away from the local church (1981:93).

This point needs to be carefully emphasized because of the growing house church movement around the world. In this movement, each house church is completely independent or only loosely connected to other house churches. Here, Dr. Ralph Neighbour’s makes a helpful distinction,

There is a distinct difference between the house church and the cell group movements. House Churches tend to collect a community of 15-25 people who meet together on a weekly basis. Usually, each House Church stands alone. While they may be in touch with nearby House Churches, they usually do not recognize any further structure beyond themselves (Neighbour 1990:193).

Emphasis is on the Components or Characteristics of the Cell

In the pure cell church, the cell is defined by its characteristics and not by the fact that it’s small and a group (George’s loose definition). The three major components of all cell groups include:

TABLE 3

MAJOR COMPONENTS IN CELL GROUPS

Get To Know God	Get To Know Each Other	Multiply The Group
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Similarity among the Cell Groups

Perhaps the phrase Quality Control best describes and defends this aspect of the pure cell system. It is quality control that enables a McDonald’s hamburger to taste the same in each of its restaurants. Customers expect that a McDonald’s hamburger will taste just as good in Georgia as in California (or Hong Kong). A similar approach can be found in the ministry of Evangelism Explosion. The reason they expect that each session is taught in a similar fashion is to assure that each trainee receives the same quality.

It is the quest for quality control in the pure cell church that requires that the small group format remains the same. The goal of each cell group is to multiply. For this reason, there is a constant need for new leaders. If these new leaders are going to be successful, they must know exactly

what to do and how to do it.

Partnership in Evangelism

It seems to me that evangelism has the highest priority in the cell church. Each cell is required to aggressively evangelize the lost. However, cell-based evangelism is different than most forms of evangelism because the team approach is used in contrast to the individual approach.

Net Fishing Versus Hook Fishing

What I'm referring to can be best illustrated by the tools of the fisherman—the net and the fishing pole. Cell group evangelism in the church uses the net to catch fish. Larry Stockstill describes it this way,

The old paradigm of 'hook fishing' is being replaced by teams of believers who have entered into partnership ('community') for the purpose of reaching souls together...Jesus used the 'partnership' of net fishing to illustrate the greatest principle of evangelism: our productivity is far greater together than alone" (note 29)

Likewise, Cho credits the growth of his 700,000+ church to his system of cell groups (note 30). Cho highlights his methodology of cell group evangelism by saying,

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 (Hurstun 1994:107).

How specifically does Cho do it? In a 1993 interview with Carl George, Cho explained how his cells go net fishing,

We have 50,000 cell groups and each group will love two people to Christ within the next year. They select someone who's not a Christian, whom they can pray for, love, and serve. They bring meals, help sweep out the person's store—whatever it takes to show they really care for them...After three or four months of such love, the hardest soul softens up and surrenders to Christ (George 1995:94).

Commenting on Cho's evangelistic method of net fishing, George says,

Cho is not talking about two 'decision cards' per group. Rather, his people win a person to the group, to the Lord, and then to the specific tenets of the faith. New people, without objecting to what is happening, are caught within the pastoral-care network of these groups...In short, Cho and others have discovered how to blend evangelism, assimilation, pastoral care, and leadership development within their small groups... (1994:94).

Although one might not agree with everything that Paul Cho says and does, the fact that he has 700,000 people in his church should cause us who are interested in church growth to listen attentively. Effective evangelism and discipleship through cell groups is not only a possibility; it's a reality.

The Whole Group Participates in Evangelism

In every sense of the word, it is small *group* evangelism. Everyone participates in some small way—from the person who invites the guest, to the one who provides refreshments for the guest, to the one who leads the discussion. This participation can be seen in prayer . For example, at Bethany World Prayer Center (Larry Stockstill is the pastor) each group has a small white board. Names of unsaved friends and family are written on the board and the whole group prays for each name until the person receives Christ and joins the cell group.

Groups Must Multiply in a Certain Time Period

This issue of cell multiplication seems to be the common thread that links all of the rapidly growing worldwide cell churches. In each one, there is rapid cell group multiplication.

Theme: Born To Multiply

In the pure cell church, the rallying cry is ‘born to multiply (note 31)’. There seems to be a genetic code established in every new group in the church—born to multiply. If the group does not multiply within a set number of months, most of these cell churches feel it’s best to dissolve the group and let those cell members integrate into groups that are experiencing growth and multiplication.

This concept of ‘born to multiply’ combines the truth of definite, specific small group cycles with the evangelistic goal of cell group multiplication. Instead of denying the one to emphasize the other, there seems to be an instant harmony between the two concepts.

Multiplication Maintains Intimacy

From a very practical standpoint, cell groups must multiply if they are going to maintain a state of intimacy while continuing to reach out to non-Christian people. There is common agreement among the experts that a cell group must be small enough so that all the members can freely contribute and share personal needs. Hadaway writes,

...the principle of cell division and growth seems critical here to help avert the problem of exclusiveness. Cell division is not always experienced as a pleasant plan of action for members who have developed deep relationships in the home group meetings. However, the purpose of such action is designed to prevent the kind of exclusiveness and inwardness that can eventually undermine one of the most significant goals of cell groups---outreach and growth (1987:101).

Length of Time before Multiplication

In many of the most rapidly growing cell churches around the world, the time that it takes for the individual cells to multiply is approximately six months (Neighbour 1992: 32-35). Neighbour states,

Long years of experience with groups has verified that they stagnate after a certain period. People draw from one another for the first six months; after that, they tend to ‘coast’ along

together. For that reason, each Shepherd Group will be expected to multiply naturally after six months or be restructured (1992: 113).

I recently even heard of a Baptist Church in Modesto, California which is multiplying their cell groups every four months (note 32). However, not all cells multiply in a matter of months. For some it's a matter of years. Carl George gives this counsel,

The gestation period for healthy groups to grow and divide ranges from four to twenty-four months. The more frequently a group meets, the sooner it's able to divide. If a group stays together for more than two years without becoming a parent, it stagnates. Bob Orr, of the Win Arn Church Growth, Inc., reports that groups that meet for a year without birthing a daughter cell only have a 50 percent chance of doing so. But every time a cell bears a child, the clock resets. Thus a small subgroup can remain together indefinitely and remain healthy and fresh by giving birth every few months (1991:101)

Bethany World Prayer Center, a true cell-based church, has adopted the policy that their cell groups must multiply within one year or be integrated into the existing structure. From my study thus far and from my practical experience of starting and directing a cell-based ministry, it seems to me that this time period is the most realistic.

Uniformity of Lesson Material

In the pure cell church, there is normally uniformity in lesson material. All of the cell leaders cover the same lesson plan (note 33). In fact, the defining point of the Cho Model for Dr. Coleman is the fact that Cho uses his Sunday morning message as lesson material for the cell leaders (1993:4:9). Similar lesson material helps maintain the quality control.

Strong Administrative Control

In the pure cell church, there is strong administrative accountability. Everyone is monitored, pastored, and accountable—from the high level pastor of pastors to the cell intern (note 34). The philosophy behind this model is Jethro's advice to Moses, (Jethro model). Jethro's advice to Moses is straightforward and demands little explanation:

When his father-in-law saw all that Moses was doing for the people, he said, 'What is this you are doing for the people? Why do you alone sit as judge, while all these people stand around you from morning till evening? . . .,' 'What you are doing is not good. You and these people who come to you will only wear themselves out. The work is too heavy for you; you cannot handle it alone. . . . You must be the people's representative before God and bring their disputes to him. Teach them the decrees and laws, and show them the way to live and the duties they are to perform. But select capable men from all the people. . . and appoint them as officials over thousands, hundreds, fifties, and tens. Have them serve as judges for the people at all times, but have them bring every difficult case to you; the simple cases they can decide themselves. That will make your load lighter, because they will share it with you. If you do this and God so commands, you will be able to stand the strain, and all these people will go home satisfied" (Exodus 18:14-23).

Everyone is Pastored

Taking Jethro's advice seriously, the pure cell church is organized into groups of tens, fifties, five hundred, and several thousand. The fundamental unit is the cell leader over ten. Then there are the section leaders which are over five cell groups, for a total of fifty people. Next are the zone leaders who oversee five section leaders for a total of 250 (note 35). It is my understanding that the district pastor will oversee up to five zone pastors which make him responsible for a total of 2500 people (Neighbour 1990:195) (note 36).

Each leader of leaders is expected to visit, counsel, teach, exhort, evangelize and help the leaders or members under their care. The difference between the zone and district pastors is that they also perform marriages, funerals, preach, offer communion, baptize, and generally carry out the professional work of the pastor (note 37). In the pure cell church, the cells are categorized geographically into districts according to zip codes. These geographical districts will often act as congregations (Neighbour 1990:356) (note 38).

Required Reporting

Administrative control also takes place through the required reporting from each cell group. From my understanding, these weekly statistical, prayer reports are not optional. They provide the administrative strength to the cell church. It is through these reports that the powerful Jethro organization takes place. A normal cell group report includes the weekly attendance in the cell group, the location of the next meeting, those who were saved, etc. (note 39)

For example, after Dr. McGavran had visited Cho's church in 1976, he called it 'the best organized church in the world' (Hurston 1995:192). I heard Cho say in 1984 that even when he is in the United States., he can locate every person in his 500,000 member church (now much larger) through the cell system (note 40). He was able to say this because of the weekly reports that each cell group completes.

Ongoing Cell Leader Training

High priority is given to the ongoing training of leadership in the cell church. I personally do not know of a cell church that does not prioritize the continual required training of cell leadership. However, I have noticed that the amount of training and the flexibility of training schedules does vary (note 41).

It might be best to simply highlight the ongoing training model of the premier cell church in the world— Yoido Full Gospel Church. First, Pastor Cho offers pre-training for all potential leaders. These potential cell leaders must attend an eight-week leadership training course that is taught on Sunday afternoon in one of Yoido Full Gospel Churches' small auditoriums (Hurston 1995:75). Topics covered in this eight-week course include: cell leader responsibilities, home cell-group growth, Bible lesson preparation, etc. (Hurston 1995:215).

From the beginning, Cho required that all cell leaders attend a weekly training session to prepare them for the next lesson and strengthen their ministry skills. However, due to the incredible growth of the cell groups, Cho discontinued that practice in 1988. Since that time, printed

supplemental materials are available before and after the Wednesday night services (Hurstun 1995:214).

At this time, the ongoing training in Cho's church consists of semiannual cell leader conferences in which pastor Cho personally addresses the cell leaders. However, even in these semiannual conferences, the numbers are so large that half of the cell leaders attend the conference one day, while the other half attend the next day. Practical tips and vision casting seem to be the main agenda for these conferences (Hurstun 1995: 75).

In Cho's church the main means of ongoing training takes place through the pastoral oversight of each leader through the Jethro system. Personal help and training is most effective as (Hurstun 1995:75):

The district pastors minister to the needs of the zone pastors

The zone pastors serve the section leaders

The section leaders take care of the cell leaders

The cell leaders meet the needs of the interns

The Rapid Releasing of Leadership

The rapid multiplication of small groups in the pure cell church makes it imperative that new leaders be found, trained, and released. This rapid releasing of new leadership can only happen as the quality control of each cell group is maintained, as diligent administrative control is exercised (e.g., the Jethro system and the weekly reporting), and as these newly released leaders find help through a ongoing system of leadership training.

Again, Paul Cho is the best example. Even in a church of 750,000, Cho has been able to maintain an average of one lay leader to every ten to sixteen church members (Hurstun 1995:68). For example, in 1988 alone, 10,000 new lay leaders were appointed for ministry (Hurstun 1995:194). In fact, when Paul Cho was asked where he got his leadership for his sixty thousand cell groups, (note 42) without even hesitating he said, "We get them from our new Christians" (Galloway 1995:105). I don't believe that Cho immediately places these new Christians into leadership, but it does mean that his major pool of leadership comes from this camp (note 43).

Very Few Programs apart from Cells

Since the Pure Cell Model promotes cells as the most important part of the church, all programs or activities must give way to the cells. There should be no competing programs. In other words, in the cell church, the program exists for the cells or better yet, the program is the cells (Neighbour 1990:68,69) . Neighbour is the most radical here. He declares,

We must actively abandon the hope that stagnant churches can be renewed by painful restructuring and the tacking on of Cell Group Church principles....The church cannot effectively mix traditional patterns of church life with Cell Group Patterns. There must be a deliberate transition. After devoting nearly a quarter of a century to attempt to help 'renew

the churches,' I am totally skeptical that it can be done (1990:36,37).

He goes on to say,

I returned to the disturbing point that has been made before in this book and will be repeated again and again, The Cell Church lifestyle is too New Testament to be blended into a PBD [program based design] structure. It causes endless conflicts for those who attempt it (1990:55).

At the same time, I have discovered that even the pure cell churches usually have a few pet programs--although they might call them something different (note 44). Realistically, perhaps it's best to say that in the cell church very few programs exist.

Most churches that are seeking to transition from a programmed-based church to a cell-church will have to wrestle with the issue of cells and programs. Should all programs be abolished? Can some remain? Which ones? As we wrestled with programs and cells in our cell-based church in Ecuador, we arrived at the conviction that the cell groups had to be the very heart of the church, but that did not mean removing all of the programs. However, it did mean that:

Everyone in the church would participate in a cell group.

Each pastor would have a significant role in the cell group ministry.

There would be an intimate connection between the cell group ministry and the other ministries of the church.

Cells Take Care of Basic Church Duties

The ideal cell church does not need another layer of structure (program) to take care of the basic, routine necessities of the church (i.e., counseling, follow-up, ushering, children's needs, etc.). In fact, little volunteer help is needed. Rather, these needs are met through the cell groups. The various districts (or in a smaller church, the sections) rotate from month to month. With this format, the burdens of a church program do not weigh down a few people in the church (note 45)

Commitment of Head Pastor to Cell Ministry

The active leadership of the head pastor in the direction of the cell ministry seems to be a clear, distinguishing mark in the pure cell church. Cho declares,

There is only one way that the home cell group system will be successful in a church, if that system is to be used as a tool of evangelism. 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 (1981:107).

Cho intuitively and experientially understands that unless the head pastor is directly involved in the cell ministry, it will not succeed. Cho talks about one North American pastor who attended his cell seminar training in Korea. This pastor was excited about the idea of cell groups, but decided to delegate the responsibility for it to an associate pastor. According to the Cho, the cells soon failed (1981:108). Why? Cho says,

The congregation sees the cell groups as only one of many varied programs in this big church. They don't see them as the key to revival or to evangelism; after all, there are so many programs aimed at those goals. The pastor isn't actively involved, so the members feel that cell groups can't be all that important (1981: 108,109).

In my research and experience in cell-based churches, I have also discovered that the role of the senior pastor is absolutely crucial to the long term success of the cell-based system. I don't believe that the head pastor can delegate his visionary leadership to someone else and expect to have a successful cell church. Larry Stockstill of Bethany World Prayer Center demonstrated his leadership commitment to the cell model in three areas:

He personally prepared the lessons for the leaders

He understood the role of instilling vision in the cell leaders by speaking to them every Wednesday evening.

He visited a different cell group every week

He connected his vision for cell ministry with his Sunday morning sermon.

Cells form Basis for Pastoral Team

I have already mentioned the pastoral roles in the cell church under the subheading of administrative control. However, suffice it to say that in the cell church each pastor has a direct role in leading and pastoring the leaders of the cell ministry (Jethro system). It's always better if the staff pastors were one time cell leaders.

Goal of 100% Participation of Members in Cell Groups

Because cells form the basic building block of life in the cell church, it is expected that everyone participates. On the negative side, to refuse to participate in a cell group indicates that one is not truly in line with the vision of the church. My initial observations indicate that membership in the cell church signifies that one is committed to the cell ministry of the church. However, in reality, there is no such thing as 100% participation, even in the purest of cell churches. Some talk about 90% participation, but 70% is closer to reality (note 46).

Comparison of the Meta Model and the Pure Cell Model

In this section I will compare the Meta Model with the Pure Cell Model. I do understand that these are only general categories. A fair amount of gray area exists between these two models. In other words, some churches using the Meta Model embrace many pure cell church principles, and other churches who might see themselves in the pure cell church category embrace many of the meta principles (note 47). Having said that, it does seem these two models have sufficiently distinguished themselves to deserve careful analysis.

Although earlier in this study I had mentioned two other small group models (Covenant and Serendipity model), they do not seem to be the choice of enough growing churches to warrant a comparative analysis. In my opinion, the Meta and Pure Cell Models are by far the most widely

used in the church today.

Comparison by Jim Egli of North Star Strategies

1. I will start by synthesizing the main points of an excellent comparative article by Jim Egli (1993:1-8). In this article, Jim is primarily comparing the Meta Model as described in George’s book, Prepare Your Church for the Future, with Ralph Neighbour’s Pure Cell Model, as described in his book, Where Do We Go From Here? (note 48). The following table represents the major differences between the Meta Model and the Pure Cell Model according to Jim Egli:

TABLE 4
KEY DIFFERENCES BETWEEN THE TWO MODELS

(Adapted from Egli, 1993)

META MODEL	PURE CELL MODEL
Tendency to view groups as another program.	Everything revolves around the small group. Small groups are the base.
The Sunday celebration is often seeker-sensitive (for unbelievers)	The Sunday celebration is believer oriented
Promotes all types of small groups within the church	Expects all members to be in a similar type of small group
Focus on gathering people through events rather than relationships	Focus on gathering people through relational evangelism through small groups
Strong nurture focus in small groups with some evangelism	Strong evangelism focus in small groups with nurture as well.
Training offered for group leaders but separate program needed for new and established believers	Training is developed for all believers primarily through the small group
Leaders on pastoral team oversee specific ministries (i.e., evangelism, small groups, etc.)	Leaders on pastoral team oversee small groups in some manner.
Values, world views, or lifestyle changes are not given a high priority	High emphasis is placed on values, vision, worldview, and lifestyle

Very flexible and easily adapted	Flexibility emerges from the core values and structure
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Comparison by Karen Hurston of Hurston Ministries

Karen Hurston is the daughter of John Hurston, who as an Assembly of God missionary worked hand and hand with Paul Cho in establishing the Yoido Full Gospel Church. Karen's latest book, *Growing the World's Largest Church*, is a recent case study of Paul Cho's church. In that book, Karen examines what she calls the incorporated system with the integrated system. What she calls the incorporated system has many similarities with the Meta Model. The integrated system which she describes is the Pure Cell Model (1994:199-205) (not49).

TABLE 5
INCORPORATED MODEL AND INTEGRATED MODEL

(Taken from Hurston 1994:199-205)

INCORPORATED SYSTEM	INTEGRATED SYSTEM
Role of senior pastor : Delegator who promotes groups to congregation	Role of senior pastor : Initiator, vision bearer, and ministry model
Group coordinator : Single staff pastor who primarily administrates	Group coordinator : Multiple staff involved in ongoing personal ministry and hands-on training
Basis of staff evaluation : Based on the performance of the groups as a program, with focus on number of groups and number of those attending group meetings	Basis of staff evaluation : Frequency and impact of personal ministry to leaders and others. Effectiveness of lay leaders they help choose and train
Management style: Administrative and does some leadership training Single cell. Best with less than 12 groups Middle management. Best with continual flow of training and motivation	Management style : Oriented to personal ministry and hands on training. Adapted model, allowing some traditional patterns programs to coexist Refined model, with staff's main focus on personal ministry and leadership development
Leadership selection and training : Usually selects from volunteers or from pool of church's existing lay-leaders; often initial 4-20 hours training is by lecture, with ongoing monthly meetings	Leadership selection and training: Encourages and chooses potential leaders from assistants; initial training often lecture, with frequent hands on and high amount of staff interaction.

Curricula : Either all groups study same curriculum, or diversity allowed according to group type	Curricula : All groups study the same curriculum developed by the church
Most common kind of group: Fellowship group, along with variety	Most common kind of group: Mixed purpose groups, often high value placed on worship
Response of congregation: 20-50% involved; sees groups as optional, 'incorporated' with other church programs	Response of congregations: 80-90% involved; see group participation as 'integrated' into a member's regular life-style
Impact: Moderate to significant impact on congregation; good network of pastoral care and avenue for assimilation	Impact: Highly significant impact on congregation only system that results in widespread evangelism
Potential problems: Reduced promotion by the senior pastor Inadequate leadership training Over involved leaders Dull curriculum Overload coordinator Two year plateau	Potential problems: Some potential problems in the system can be similar to that in others; but the most frequent is discouragement, for this system takes years to develop, requiring staff to shift from a focus on programs to a focus on personal ministry and leadership development

General Observations

The observations both by Jim Egli and Karen Hurston shed light on some of the key differences between these two systems. In studying the Meta Model versus the Pure Cell Model, several key points stood out in my mind:

TABLE 6
PERSONAL OBSERVATIONS OF TWO MODELS

	META MODEL	PURE CELL CHURCH
TYPES OF SMALL GROUPS		

Any type of group is acceptable in the Meta Model
The cell group is similar in vision, focus, format, and purpose

**SMALL
GROUPS /
CHURCH
PROGRAM**

There is no conflict between the small groups and church programs because oftentimes the small groups are simply another program

The cell groups are the program

Other programs are generally resisted in order to prioritize the cell ministry

**HEAD
PASTOR**

Could possibly delegate this ministry to an associate pastor and still maintain the small group program

Must be at the very center of the cell ministry in order to guarantee success

**ADMINIS-
TRATIVE
CONTROL**

Very loose and flexible with some light control

Strongly organized, directed, and controlled system to ensure quality control

**MULTIPLICA
TION**

A desired option for the small groups

A prerequisite for group to continue

Strongly encouraged and promoted

**LEADER-SHIP
TRAINING**

Some kind of ongoing training, although flexible and loosely organized

Closely monitored, required ongoing training

STUDY MATERIAL

Leaders free to choose
Material chosen for leaders

Summary of the Two Models

Here I'd like to highlight some key distinctions and similarities between the two models. I will also partly critique some of the potential weaknesses.

Similarities

Both place a high priority on small group ministry.

Both find support in the cell group success of Paul Cho.

Both use the Jethro system to care for each leader.

The elements of discipleship and evangelism are normally found in both models.

Distinctions

Centrality in the Church

Probably the major distinction between the Pure Cell Church and the Meta Model is the priority given to the small groups. The Pure Cell Model makes the cell ministry the central function in the church. Cells are seen as THE program instead of one of the programs. The concentrated effort of both leader and member hinges around what takes place in the weekly cell gathering.

In contrast, the Meta Model tends to elevate the small group to the status of a very important program in the church. Because the seeker sensitive service is normally the major program in the church, the small groups seem to be used as a supporting tool to the overall temple strategy of the church.

Pastoral versus Evangelistic

In the Pure Cell Model evangelism is a major priority in the small group. Cells are the net that draws in the harvest. In the Pure Cell Model, multiplication is not even an option. It's part of the strategy. The Pure Cell Church positions the cells to fulfill the primary outreach of the church through the multiplication of each group.

In contrast, the Meta Model utilizes the cells groups for more of a pastoral, networking purpose. The primary evangelism comes from the seeker sensitive service. Four of the five case study Meta churches in this tutorial depended on their seeker sensitive service to attract non-Christians. In these churches the cells are the way to close the back door, but not the primary means of evangelism. The one Meta church that depended on the cells to evangelize has recently been declining (New Hope Community).

Similarity of Group Meeting Versus Various Group Structures

In the Pure Cell Church, the same lesson and general format is used in all of the groups. The similarity of the small group gathering helps guarantee the quality control. Leaders and members know what to expect in a cell meeting and new leaders can be trained more rapidly. Cell leader training and multiplication of the cell group is more easily accomplished in the pure cell approach because all are trained in the same techniques, goals, and material.

Due to the variety of small groups and material in the Meta Model, multiplication and ongoing training are more difficult to maintain. The needs of each leader is so unique and different that effective training and control usually breaks down.

Tight Administrative Control Versus Flexibility of Structure

The Pure Cell System tends to emphasize tight administrative control. Weekly reports are a must. Oftentimes the cell leaders receive weekly or bimonthly training. The Jethro system is applied to a greater extent in the Pure Cell Model.

On the other hand, in the Meta Model, flexibility and variety are important values. The administrative control is often loose and flexible. The freedom that the Meta Model offers is very appealing in a North American culture which is very individualistic and likes to have many choices. In other cultures, these traits are not so highly esteemed.

Concern about the Variety of Small Groups in the Meta Model

In his Fuller doctoral dissertation on cell ministry David Tan states,

For the Meta-Church any type of groups within the church constitutes the cells. All these groups may have different agendas and purposes. The main principle is to involve as many members as possible in groups. Since it is impossible to enroll everyone and the agenda of every group cannot be identical, the goal of the Meta-Church is accommodation (Tan 1994:18).

As was mentioned earlier, in the Meta Model there are groups for everyone: children, ushers, parking lot attendants, greeters, staging, lighting, drama, vocal groups, orchestra, Vietnam Veterans, blended families, etc. (Galloway 1995:18). The concern that I have in labeling all of these activities as cell groups is that the emphasis subtly shifts from the components of small group life to a more generalized concept of anything small equals a small group.

This is a very subtle distinction, but I have noticed that this concept seems to have an adverse affect on the cell-based structure. It has the potential of cheapening the small group vision by saying that a small group usher's meeting in the church is the same as a home based small group. In fact, the two are worlds apart, due to the setting and the purpose. I have a suspicion that the lack of quality control in this smorgasbord approach might eventually weaken the entire system.

For example, in Ecuador, our head pastor strongly insisted every week, that everyone attend a weekly cell group, so that they might receive personal care and might be able to reach their

neighbors. What the people did not receive in the main worship service, we knew that they could receive through the pastoral care in the small groups. We also knew that the cell groups in the church would be open to receive the people that heard that announcement on Sunday morning.

Yet, how could our people in Ecuador receive this type of care by joining a ‘sports team’ which meets for a season, or by attending a ‘Sunday School class’ which meets for a semester and studies an academic subject, or by being on a ‘committee’ which might meet for a month. It’s not that such gatherings are not important, it’s simply that they do not fulfill the purposes of a cell group. By joining such a group, the person would not truly be pastored and in many cases would not be comfortable in inviting his or her friend. As pastors, we could not be assured that God’s purposes were being fulfilled in the life of our members.

By calling all small gatherings ‘cell groups’, I believe that a certain confusion is created (note 50). In summary, I believe that the focus needs to be on the elements that make up a small group and not the fact that it is a gathering and it is small (note 51).

Chapter 4: U.S. Case Studies of the Meta Model

Of the five churches that I have chosen, four of them overtly declare that they are part of the Meta Model. Saddleback Church is the only one which does not outwardly identify with that model. Nevertheless, what Saddleback actually does in their small group system is almost identical to the Meta Model, so I have taken the liberty to categorize it under that framework.

Many churches are experimenting with the Meta Model throughout the United States. In Carl George’s most recent book, *The Coming Church Revolution*, he provides vignettes about forty churches that are currently using the Meta Model (1994: 9,10). Because I could not study all of those churches, I had to make a deliberate choice among the possibilities. The ones that I did choose are:

TABLE 7

ATTENDANCE OF CASE STUDY CHURCHES

Willow Creek Community Church	attendance: approx.- 16,000
Saddleback Church	attendance: approx.- 11,000
New Hope Community Church	attendance: approx.- 4,000
Cincinnati Vineyard	attendance: approx.- 3,500
Fairhaven Alliance Church	attendance: approx.- 1,500

Probably the main criterion for choosing these particular churches was the question of

prominence. In other words, these churches are well-known throughout the United States, (Note 52) both because of their numerical growth as well of their effective small group ministry.

These case studies are not intended to be in-depth (note 53). My purpose is to give a brief summary of the church and their small group ministry. I conducted two of the case studies through personal visits (Cincinnati Vineyard and Fairhaven Alliance). For the other three I relied on books, pamphlets, seminars, and personal interviews by phone or during a seminar

New Hope Community Church

Lyman Coleman refers to Dale Galloway's church as the major advocate of the Cho model in the U.S (Coleman 1993: 5:19) (note 54) However, I believe it is more accurate to describe the New Hope Community Church as the first prototype Meta Model of small group ministry. It was this church that was Carl George's primary U.S. case study before he wrote the book, *Prepare Your Church for the Future* (note 55). George Hunter calls Dale Galloway, 'a significant pioneer in small groups ministries today' (1996: 85). His church is based on a wide assortment of small groups (note 56). His most recent work (1995) summarizes his years of experience in cell-based ministry.

Type of Small Group Ministries

The small groups at New Hope Community Church can be divided into three distinct types: 1. Nurture groups 2. Support groups 3. Task groups. The nurture groups provide most of the pastoral care in the church. The support groups are instruments of healing, while the task groups gather together people performing diverse types of service (ushering, etc.). There is even an entire district of groups involved in the church's music ministry (Hunter 1996:88). Along with the nurture groups, the task groups meet together for sharing, prayer, and Bible application. According to George Hunter, "...every group has an empty chair, as a symbol of the group's mission to reach at least one new person every six months (1996:87).

Training

The training of small group leaders is very important in this model. Galloway says it well, "The most important job of the pastor and the pastoral staff is leadership development, training lay leaders who will build small groups. Leadership development is essential, and it must be top priority. It cannot be left to chance" (1995:118). Galloway offers a Superbowl event three times a year in which any cell member is welcome to attend. From the superbowl future leaders emerge who face the challenge of raising up their own group Once the group is formed, the leaders are required to attend a weekly training event where they are given the notes to the pastors and discussion questions for Bible application (Coleman 1993: 5:19).

Present Effectiveness

How effective is New Community Church today? Does this church continue to be a leading model of cell-based ministry? At this point, the answer appears to be no. Dale Galloway has recently resigned from the church and entered the world of seminary education (Note 57). From my understanding, even before he left, the church was experiencing problems. I first became aware of those problems during a brief conversation with Rick Warren during one of his Purpose Driven Seminars (Note 58). I asked Rick about the state of small group ministries in the church today. He responded by pointing out the apparent failure of the Meta Model in Dale Galloway's church. At that time Rick mentioned that Galloway's church had dropped from 6000 in attendance to 1000 in attendance (Note 59).

I talked with one of the pastors who has been at New Hope Community Church for some 16 years (note 60). Pastor Bev told me that the church has dropped from 6000 in attendance to the present 3000. The number of small groups has also dropped. From the 625 small groups reported by George Hunter (1996: 85), there are now 350. According to Bev, out of the 3000 people attending the church, there might be about 1000 people in the weekly small groups (note 61). She made it quite clear that even before Dale Galloway resigned, the church had begun to lose steam. People stopped attending the Tender Loving Care Groups. The cell leadership began to show signs of weakness.

During my conversation with Pastor Bev, I readily detected that she tended to interpret the present difficulties at New Community in a spiritual light. She was quick to point out the positive aspects of what God was presently doing in their midst (it's natural that a person on staff is not going to spill all of the 'inner workings' of the church with a stranger over the telephone) (note 62). She did mention that the new pastor, Rev. Cotton, was giving the church a new focus and direction. Interestingly, she said that this new direction involved evangelism as a chief focus—but not necessarily small group ministry.

Evaluation

What has really gone wrong at New Hope Community Church? Is it that the Meta Model doesn't work in the U.S.? No, I don't think so. However, I would like to offer two observations concerning the Meta Model at New Hope Community Church. First, it appears that pastor Galloway might have become overly occupied with his seminar ministry and outside speaking.

This observation originated from one who understands cell ministry and the situation at Galloway's church. His name is David Tan (note 63) David told me that pastor Galloway's outside speaking schedule became so hectic that he would arrive on the weekend to preach at New Hope Community and leave Monday morning to begin an intense seminar schedule. Such outside activity might have contributed to the difficulties at New Hope.

My second observation that might have contributed to the cracks in the wall at New Hope has to do with the categorization of small groups at New Hope. The fact that there was such a plethora of small groups might have contributed to the break down of training, vision, administration, and overall effectiveness (note 64).

