



A closer look at one of the fastest growing church models in the world

I love Jesus and I love youth ministry... and I thank the Lord for the privilege of working with young people for many years. We have ministered under many different church styles and in many different countries and we have come to embrace and appreciate the biblical principles we share with our Sonlife family around the world.

We are living in an incredible time for youth ministry! God appears to be doing more things, with more people, in more places around the world than ever before. We get to be a part of what will one day be written about in church history books.

The following is a closer look at a ministry model started in Bogotá, Colombia over 20 years ago. The MCI church is one of the fastest growing churches in the world today. When we visited Bogotá, we went with a critical heart looking for reasons to say it couldn't be for us... but after close study and personal success we have come to the conclusion that it is of God and merits the attention of anyone truly interested in discipleship and growth.

The model of ministry based on 12, is one of the most effective means of obeying the great commission of Jesus Christ to win disciples and of growing the Church. The key to success in this model is found in leading groups of 12. Jesus taught us this lesson through His own example. He did not deal with people based on their obvious abilities, but according to the potential He knew they had within.

Jesus could have poured His life into the multitudes, but He did not; instead He chose 12 and worked to shape their characters. Each of the 12 had completely contrasting personalities and for three years, like the potter with the clay, Jesus molded each one of them.

The model of 12 has always been in God's heart. The number 12 symbolizes government. At creation God established 12 months to govern each year; even days are governed by periods of 12 hours each. To govern the people of Israel, God established 12 tribes and King Solomon appointed 12 governors.

This ministry is based on the above principles and a concept developed and proven internationally geared at winning souls to the Kingdom.

the vision

To win souls and make disciples

the goal:

Every believer a leader

Values of the G12 Strategy

For years many churches in the United States and around the world have placed a high value on intercession, spiritual gifts, spiritual warfare, church growth, evangelism, missions, care for the poor, training and mobilization. All these things are central to the G12 vision. One of the most effective ways to express them is through cells. This is because the *dynamic life* of the church takes place in the cells.

The vision of many youth pastors is for *mobilization*. This is all about winning, equipping and releasing the body of Christ into the ministry. The church body - not just full-time ministers - is called to the service of Jesus! A church's size is secondary to this goal of effective mobilization, but there can be no doubt that those who move forward in this vision are set for explosive growth.

The key to the success of the G12 vision is not just the strategy, but the *values* that uphold the Vision. Success will not be achieved simply by *adopting* the G12 strategy. One must rise to the challenge spiritually, take on new levels of the Holy Spirit's anointing and, above all, embrace all the values that lie beneath the surface.

1. The G12 Vision is about discipleship

Jesus said, "Make *disciples*" --Matthew 28:19-20...He did not just tell us to evangelize or to get converts. People who accept the gospel and believe must be disciplined. They must be taught, shaped and formed into the image of Jesus. The Church often falls short of full obedience in this respect. Many people who make decisions to become Christians are never truly disciplined in the paths of Christ. We can no longer be satisfied with how many people say the prayer of salvation, we have to be obedient and see these new converts transformed into disciples of Jesus.

2. The G12 Vision is about cells

Cells are small groups of people who meet together weekly in order to disciple each other and reach out to those who don't know Christ. The cells are where the blessing of growth takes place. Cells are a very key element in fulfilling the New Testament mandate we have as believers to be disciples and to disciple others. That's where you receive the *personal* ministry you need and where you find and *fulfill your ministry* in the body of Christ.

3. The G12 Vision is for leadership

The name 'G12' stands for 'the government of 12' which emphasizes the leadership development aspect of the vision. Every Christian is a potential leader. We are all called to serve Jesus and to lead others to Him. Those who are leading cells are disciplined in groups of 12 (like the 12 disciples of Jesus). Therefore everyone who *ministers* is also *ministered to* in this vision. That means there is proper accountability in all things.

Cell leadership is a prerequisite to all other ministry areas, ie. worship team, teaching ministries, even ushers. This ensures that the church has a servant's heart, a compassion for the lost, a pursuit for purity and a vibrant prayer life in every area of ministry.

4. The G12 Vision is for multiplication

This is one of the most exciting aspects of the vision. Jesus' purpose for us is fruitfulness. He wants us to be successful in our lives. He calls us to 'be fruitful and multiply.' The growth that comes through the G12 Vision is not through transferring members from the other churches. It comes through the cells as the members reach out to their family, neighbors and friends. This means everyone must develop a passion for the lost and reach them uncompromisingly for Christ. It also encourages *unity* between churches as we strive to together to reach our cities for God.

5. The G12 Vision is for the glory of God

Something wonderful happens when God's people are mobilized. The 'super star syndrome' disappears and the work is done by all. The real *heroes* in this vision are the *members of the church*--not a handful of its 'super-

anointed' leaders. This way God can really get the glory. Signs, wonders, miracles and mighty deeds happen throughout the whole church, and everyone has a part to play. Every week there are many miracle reports of what happened in someone's home through the hands of 'just another lay person'.

As you can see the vision is a comprehensive one. It takes time for a church to fully implement it. It involves introducing new initiatives and creative innovation in every area of church and personal life. It will bring unrecognizable transformation to the way we think about church fellowship and to the way we do things. The cost will be high. But the rewards will be worth it

PARADIGMS:

Re-thinking how we 'do church'

Every youth pastor wants to know how to make their ministry grow. But growth is more than a strategy. **Every vision from God comes with certain values which sustain it.**

When most church leaders hear about the amazing growth in the MCI church in Colombia they immediately want to know the details of the G12 strategy. But the G12 is more than a strategy for growth. **It is a fully developed vision for discipleship, nurture and mission.** It sets the pattern for church life in the 21st Century.

Many youth leaders come to the mission field and are defaulted into the basic ministry strategy that they had learned elsewhere. Does it bear fruit?...yes Do they tend to feel their vested time was worth it?...yes, *any* fruit is worth it... But there is an inherited tendency to spiritually justify everything that happens in our ministries.... if someone has much fruit.. it was God's will for them.... and if not, we tend to look for a reason to pacify our frustrations or will say we are *quality* conscious... (as if to say it has to be either quality or quantity)

The first church experienced tremendous growth and set forth a pattern that can be modeled today. It's not a matter of church size... Growth is evidence of good health. A healthy church is full of healthy believers; each one personally embracing Jesus' call to ministry.

*“...making every member of the church a trained leader
in order to reproduce the work of God”*

The Heart of the Vision

The G12 model facilitates the multiplication of cell groups, the training of new leaders and the discipleship of every member of the body. The aim of the model is that everybody is involved in reaching the lost through an open cell. The goal is for everybody to become a leader and run their own open cell. Everyone is *ministered to* and everyone is a *minister*.

The cell groups do not divide - instead they multiply. When a person becomes part of a cell they start to pray and fast for three non-Christians. One by one they are led to Christ and become part of the cell. When the cell has grown to some size the multiplication takes place. Each person in the cell then starts to build a new cell. They continue to receive help, mentoring and encouragement from the original cell, but they also start their own cell. When all the members of the original cell have started their own new cell, the original cell becomes a G12 group. The G12 group is made up of leaders who have their own cells and meet for leadership training, to share about their progress, and for encouragement and support.

A Cell Church...or a Church with Cells...

There is a world of difference between a cell church and the traditional church approach to small groups. Many churches have believed in the value of cells for years; they have started, and re-started their cell programs, they have organized and then re-organized their leaders... but most have reported that at the end of their 'blood, sweat and tears', less than 10% of their church was actively involved. The most common response regarding the cell strategy is: "oh we tried that and it wasn't for us..." Leaders have attached different levels of importance to cells; some churches see them as a vital part of their life and vision, while others see them as just another program.

A New Testament approach to church

The apostles of the New Testament could never have achieved what they did without a cell church vision. For example, in Jerusalem on the Day of Pentecost, 3,000 people were added to the church. They were all baptized in water and they all continued steadfast in the faith. They were all taught in the apostles' doctrine. They were all faithful in prayer, and were all a committed part of the fellowship. This is a far cry from today's situation where up to 93% of those who make a commitment to Christ fall away from it, and only 30% of those who get as far as some form of church involvement actually persist.

There are many reasons for the success of the early church but without a doubt one of the most significant reasons in the Jerusalem church was their cell emphasis.

"So continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, they ate their food with gladness and simplicity of heart..." --Acts 2:46

As well as the large meetings in the Temple courts, they met regularly in one another's homes. These were not just house meetings or home fellowship groups as found in the traditional approach to small groups today. They were cells - that is, micro churches - doing everything that a church should do. They witnessed, they evangelized, they fellowshiped, they prayed, they nurtured and they cared for the poor - all in the cells. Nothing else adequately explains their effectiveness in making disciples and their experience of explosive growth.

The Church in Miniature

This concept of the cell group has little in common with the traditional approach to house groups in many churches today. Home fellowship groups, prayer groups, special interest groups, Bible study groups may all have something to offer, but they are not cells groups. What is a cell group then? David Finnell, in his book 'Life in His Body' says cells are "the organizing of the body of believers in small groups for the purpose of worship, experiencing God, ministering to one another, and ministering to and evangelizing the community." In short, cells do everything that 'church' does, only in miniature. This means that the cell is the primary unit of 'church' where the real work of the church goes on.

G12 CORE PRINCIPLES

There are four stages in obeying the Great Commission. Each one is necessary for full obedience. They are to Win, Consolidate, Disciple and Send.

WIN

New believers are added to the church **primarily** through *personal friendship evangelism* through the cell groups. The advantage to the cell vision is that you don't wait for the people to come to the church, but instead

the church is brought to the people. A non-believer is more apt to go to a person's home than to an impersonal church building. Most people attend the Sunday church service after having gone to several cell meetings. At the end of each of the church services, the pastor invites those who have made a first time commitment to come to the front. The counseling team, which is made up of cell group leaders, joins the new believers. The new believers are then taken to a separate room and the process of consolidation begins.

CONSOLIDATE

At this point personal details are recorded and the gospel is shared again to ensure that the person understands what has happened to them. The person is then told that someone will call them within two days to find out how they are. The responsibility of the cell leader is to ensure that the new believer is called within 48 hours and receives a personal visit within a week.

The consolidation process continues through a series of New Believer classes and through a special Encounter Weekend. This encounter retreat focuses upon giving the new believer an experience of Jesus. The weekend covers such areas as assurance of salvation, identity in Christ, inner healing, deliverance, being filled with the Spirit, and the vision of the church. This is when their Christian character is really being formed.

DISCIPLE

The aim is to enable every new believer to walk in the character of Christ and then to become a leader of a new cell. Therefore when each disciple has completed the consolidation process they enter the School of Leaders. The School of Leaders involves training one night a week for about 12 months.

Towards the end of this training period, each person in the school of leaders launches a new cell group. The leader of the new cell continues to receive support, help and instruction from their original cell. As each of the members of the original cell starts their cells the original cell becomes a G12 group. The G12 group is therefore a *leadership cell*.

SEND

When each of the original leader's 12 have grown their 12 the next step is for these to begin to form teams to lead Encounter weekends and for them to develop their own School of Leaders. As the multiplication takes place more people are needed to teach in the School of Leaders. Therefore emphasis is given to the School of Teachers to show people how to teach the material and how to see the teaching applied to people's lives.

The new leaders are first sent to their neighborhood, then to their cities, then to the world. Who better to be sent to the nations than one who first has been proven.

SUMMARY: Cell church or traditional methodology?

This leads to a number of significant differences between a cell church and a traditional church. A traditional church is *program* centered, but a cell church is *people* centered. A traditional church is built on the strength of its magnificent programs. If you have bigger and better programs then you have a bigger and better church! But the church is not programs; it is people. This people centered approach can only be consistently sustained in a church where the central thrust of its ministry is reaching people who primarily relate in the small group setting and not just in the big services.

A traditional church is building centered. Usually, this is where it all happens. The size, location and architecture of the church building then determines the activity of the church. People assume that once the meeting is over and the building is vacated, that church is over for another week. But in a cell church that cannot happen. Because the main work of the church is undertaken by the members in their cells, the cell church is community centered, not building centered. The central services are a celebration of what God has done throughout the week and a preparation for more of the same in the coming week.

The traditional church sends the signal to one and all, "Come!" But the cell church's message is, "Go!" The traditional church's model of ministry calls for a passive response, "Listen", and the cell church's clarion call is, "Do!" It has an active model of ministry. The people are empowered to do the ministry of Christ.

All this implies a radical change of thinking on our part. We must learn the power of cell life in the body of Christ. The G12 Vision cannot work without a cell church vision...in order to successfully mobilize the membership to do the work of Christ and truly function as part of His body.

Another way to summarize this strategy is: a FOLLOW ME ministry... Jesus' invitation to the first disciples was "follow me"... those who imitate Him do the same; every believer is called to *live* like Him, *love* like Him, *disciple* like Him and *serve* like Him. Every home cell group is an open door with a Christ follower there saying; *follow me...* I know the way to Jesus" I see this vision as "revelation" from God...for this appointed time.

"The Lord replied: *"Write down the revelation and make it plain on tablets so that a herald may run with it.*
³*For the revelation awaits an appointed time...* --Habakkuk 2:2,3

This paper was written for discussion at GYI Forum by Jerry Manderfield, 03/2005, San Jose, Costa Rica

Jerry & Barb pastor a youth group of over 1100 youth in Medellín, Colombia They have 450 students in their School of Leaders They are seeing aprox. 40 students/month attending their New Believer Encounter retreats Their retention average has gone from around 5% to over 50% in the last five years
