

Home Cell Group Explosion

Home Cell Group Explosion:

*How Your Small Group Can
Grow and Multiply*

by Joel Comiskey



TOUCH PUBLICATIONS
Houston, Texas

Copyright © 1998, 2002 by Joel Comiskey
Published by TOUCH Publications

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopy, recording or otherwise, without the prior written consent of the publisher.

International Standard Book Number: 1-880828-42-1

All Scripture quotations, unless otherwise indicated, are from the Holy Bible, New International Version, Copyright © 1973, 1978, 1984 by International Bible Society. Used by permission.

Editing, book layout, cover design and illustration: Elizabeth Bruns, Rick Chandler, Jim Egli, Randall Neighbour, and Brian Williams.

TOUCH Publications is the book-publishing division of TOUCH Outreach Ministries, a resource and consulting ministry for churches with a vision for cell-based local church structure.

Available from:
TOUCH Outreach Ministries
P.O. Box 7847 • Houston, TX 77270, USA
800-735-5865 Website: www.touchusa.org

CONTENTS

Foreword	7
Preface	9
Introduction.....	11
Chapter 1: Successful Cell-Based Churches	15
Chapter 2: Cell Church Basics	17
Chapter 3: Relax! You Don't Need To Be A Superstar	29
Chapter 4: Pray!	33
Chapter 5: Set Goals	45
Chapter 6: Raise Up New Leaders	53
Chapter 7: Attract Visitors	69
Chapter 8: Reach Out As A Team	79
Chapter 9: Evangelize By Meeting Needs	91
Chapter 10: Prepare For A Smooth Delivery	95
Chapter 11: Understand Cell Planting	105
Chapter 12: Understand Mother-Daughter Multiplication ..	121
Chapter 13: A Parable	131
Appendix A	135
Notes	139
Study Guide	147
Index	175

FOREWORD

This is a book for the harvest.

We are now living in the midst of the greatest harvest of souls that Christian history has ever recorded. More people are being born again and more churches are being multiplied than anyone could have imagined only a few years ago.

That's the good news. The bad news is that much of the fruit being harvested is not fruit that remains. While we rightly rejoice over the current expansion of the kingdom of God, those in the know realize that it should be expanding even more than it actually is.

Why is it, for example, that city-wide evangelistic campaigns, which continue to be popular decade after decade, find so few of their converts in local churches one year later? The norm has been that of those individuals who make first-time decisions for Christ at the campaign, the number who end up in local churches runs between 3 percent and 16 percent. No one I know, including the evangelists themselves, is happy with those figures.

Moreover, many churches that have strong evangelistic ministries and that do see considerable numbers of new converts coming into their churches also have wide open back doors. The annual growth of their church does not reflect the inflow of new members as it should.

The situations I have just described are familiar enough, and they are widespread. However, all evangelistic efforts and all growing churches have not been victims of people falling through the cracks. By and large, the churches which are retaining the

Foreword

greatest percentage of the harvest are those churches which have successfully developed their infrastructure. There are different ways of dealing with that infrastructure, but the majority of the churches which have done it today and which have broken growth barrier after growth barrier are churches which have stressed home cell groups.

No one knows that better than my friend Joel Comiskey. He is a combination of a local church practitioner and a painstaking scholar. Instead of writing a book on "here is how we do it in our church," Joel spent hundreds of hours and thousands of dollars to visit personally eight of the highest-visibility cell group churches today, to interview their leaders, to participate in the life of the churches, and to record his findings in this book, *Home Cell Group Explosion*.

I love this book because it is not focused on the home cell, but on the lost. Other books deal with the dynamics of the cell itself, but this one focuses on the multiplication of cells for the greatest evangelistic results. If your church has an open back door, you have in your hands a guidebook to close it. If some of the fruit you are seeing is not fruit that remains, here is how to change the situation for good.

Home Cell Group Explosion is truly a book for the harvest!

C. Peter Wagner
Fuller Theological Seminary

PREFACE

As I write, several dozen books on small groups are lined up before me. They cover topics from the Bible and small groups, to small-group dynamics, to pure cell church ministry. Not one of them, however, focuses on how small groups evangelize. Dr. Van Engen, professor of Missiology at Fuller Theological Seminary, expressed this void during my Ph.D. proposal defense. "There are enough books on small-group dynamics," he said. "However, we need to learn how small groups evangelize." That day I felt commissioned. He gave me a new objective for my research. This, then, is a book about how small groups evangelize, grow and eventually multiply.

INTRODUCTION

Ever so subtly, God has led me down the path of small-group ministry. Three years after receiving Jesus Christ at age 17, I felt called to start a home Bible study. Friends gathered each week to hear this young, zealous teenager; by God's grace, some of them stayed. During one of those sessions, Jesus called me to be a missionary.

As a missionary candidate with the Christian and Missionary Alliance, I planted an inner-city church in Long Beach, California. To start the church in 1984, I gathered people in my home. That same year, David Yonggi Cho, pastor of the world's largest church, presented lectures on church growth at Fuller Theological Seminary. I sat awed as he related story after story about how every one of the 500,000 members of Yoido Full Gospel Church in Seoul, Korea, received pastoral care through one of the church's 20,000 cell groups.

Filled with enthusiasm, I bought Cho's book *Successful Home Cell Groups* and began to teach key leaders in my church.¹ The excitement lasted for awhile, and we started four cells. But after we introduced a Sunday morning service, I lost the grip on my small-group focus. Church chores sapped my strength. Still, I never lost the vision and excitement for what a church could become through a small-group ministry.

A few years later, I was a missionary in Ecuador, and the opportunity arrived to reclaim the embers of my vision for small-group ministry. My wife and I, placed on a pastoral team in a strategic church in Quito, Ecuador, were supposed to stimulate growth that would result in a daughter church. Many received Christ month after month, but relatively few stayed. We wrestled

Introduction

as a pastoral team about how to close “the back door.” We planned Sunday school activities, new believers’ classes and visitation programs, all with little success.

My first year on that pastoral team was a dark night of the soul. The other pastors listened politely as I made suggestions in broken Spanish. I longed to communicate church growth ideas, but I lacked the fluency and cultural knowledge. Week after week, I left the pastoral team meeting discouraged and downtrodden. At one point, the team leader seriously considered replacing me with a more experienced missionary who was returning from furlough.

In those dark moments, as I hovered between success and failure as a first-term missionary, God began to speak. He showed me that our church (El Batán) desperately needed a cell ministry. God placed a burden on my heart that I couldn’t shake. I knew it was of Him. Insights from David Yonggi Cho flooded my mind. When I shared this vision with the pastoral team, they gave my wife and me the green light to pursue it.

We already were working with university students, so we organized them into five groups that focused on evangelism and discipleship. Those groups began to grow. Soon the young married couples wanted us to organize small groups among them. Those groups began to multiply and bear fruit, too. We grew from the initial five groups in 1992 to 51 groups in 1994. About 400 people, most of them new converts, were added to the El Batán Church and began to attend the Sunday morning services. In Ecuador, where only 3.5 percent of the population knew Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior, it was especially clear that this was a work of God.

We eventually birthed a daughter church from El Batán. Using the cell concept, we started with 10 cell groups and 150 people. In less than one year, the 10 cells multiplied to 20 and the church grew to 350 people. The church growth continues unabated with the cells as its base.

God is sovereign. Never in my wildest dreams could I have imagined traveling around the world “in search of the perfect cell church.” But that’s exactly what I did for two years. My Ph.D. studies on unlocking the secrets of the cell movement took me to Korea, Singapore, Louisiana, El Salvador, Honduras, Colombia,

Introduction

Ecuador and Peru. My mentor, C. Peter Wagner, believed in me and my work, thus providing needed inspiration.

I know what it's like to start a cell ministry from scratch. I've experienced failure, but I've also tasted success. From both personal experience and thorough research, I've discovered dynamic principles and practical insights to share with others who have a vision for reaching the world through cell churches. By God's grace, they are presented in the following pages.

SUCCESSFUL CELL-BASED CHURCHES

“**I**f you want to know how churches grow, study growing churches!” This one sentence embodies the core of church growth research. You may have thought this was a book about small-group evangelism, but the two can’t be separated. At least they shouldn’t. Small-group evangelism and dynamic church growth are two sides of the same coin. They are one.

When I began to study small-group evangelism, I chose to research the most prominent and fastest growing cell-based churches in the world. Why not study what works? These churches are located in eight different countries and four distinct cultures.

As the table at the top of the following page illustrates, small-group evangelism that results in dynamic church growth is a worldwide phenomenon. No longer is the U.S. the fountain of Christian knowledge for the rest of the world. However, one excellent example in the U.S. is Bethany World Prayer Center in Baker, Louisiana, the premier cell church in the U.S. Each year, 1,000 pastors attend small-group seminars at BWPC. Bethany is on the cutting edge primarily because of its willingness to learn from other fast-growing churches around the world. Bethany has sent its leaders to capture principles from cell churches in Colombia, El Salvador, Korea and Singapore.

To learn from the eight case-study churches, I spent an average of eight days in each one. More than 700 cell leaders completed my 29-question survey, designed to determine why some cell leaders succeed and others fail at evangelizing and giving birth to a new cell group.¹ The questionnaire explored such areas as the cell

Home Cell Group Explosion

Abbreviation	Name of Church	Location	Senior Pastor	No. of Cells	No. of Worshipers
BWPC	Bethany World Prayer Center	Baker, LA USA	Larry Stockstill	600	8,000
CCG	The Christian Center of Guayaquil	Guayaquil, Ecuador	Jerry Smith	2,000	7,000
EC	Elim Church	San Salvador, El Salvador	Mario Vega	5,500	35,000
FCBC	Faith Community Baptist Church	Singapore	Lawrence Khong	600	10,000
ICM	The International Charismatic Mission	Bogota, Colombia	César Castellanos	20,000	47,000
LAC	Love Alive Church	Tegucigalpa, Honduras	René Peñalba	1,000	7,000
LWC	Living Water Church	Lima, Peru	Peter Hornung Bobbio	900	9,000
YFGC	Yoido Full Gospel Church	Seoul, Korea	David Cho	25,000	253,000 ²

Table 1. Description of Case-Study Churches (2002 data)

leader’s training, social status, devotions, education, preparation of material, age, spiritual gifts, gender, etc. This statistical analysis helped keep my bias at bay and enabled me to unlock common principles across diverse cultures.

Donald McGavran once gave an illustration of two pastors who preached the Word of God. One claimed that his church grew because he preached the Word of God, while the other insisted that his church did not grow because he preached the Word of God. I chuckled at first, but then acknowledged its application to the current scene. So often, Christian leaders really don’t know why churches grow or decline. Individual interpretations and opinions prevail. Similar confusion abounds about cell multiplication.

As the population continues to explode in the 21st century, the cell church model holds exciting possibilities of reaching a lost world for Jesus Christ. I pray that the information gathered from these cell-based churches will help you and your church more effectively complete the mission of our Lord Jesus Christ.