

MINISTERIAL INTERNSHIP PROGRAM

SEMINAR V

Theme: “The Pentecostal Minister and the Work of the Church”

A Strategy for Developing an Urban-Based, Multi-Cultural Church

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INTRODUCTION

The task of evangelizing the lost and building growing churches has become extremely challenging in the twenty-first century. Old traditional practices that pastors have used effectively in the past do not seem to work as effectively as before. What must a pastor and a church planter know about church planting and church growth in the twenty-first century?

This study will briefly discuss three paradigm shifts in ministry that affect twenty-first century church planting and growth. These are:

- 1. The effects of philosophical changes in urban America.**
- 2. The effects of the disorientation of life in urban America.**
- 3. The effects of demographic changes in urban America.**

Church planters and pastors must face these realities affecting ministry in the twenty-first century in order to effectively minister to those needing Christ in the midst of the pressures of the world today. An understanding of these realities would help church leaders effectively apply the following strategies for church planting and growth that are discussed in this study.

These strategies are as follows:

Urban strategy #1: Integration versus Independence

Urban strategy #2: Mega church versus small group church

Urban strategy #3: Focusing on key age groups versus the “shotgun approach”

I. THE EFFECTS OF PHILOSOPHICAL CHANGES IN URBAN AMERICA

We live in an experience-saturated culture. Many youths and young adults experiment with alcohol, drugs, “rave parties” etc., because they want to experience “thrills,” which actually prove to be empty and temporary.

Pentecostals, like us, who focus on “experiencing God” have the opportunity to reach postmodern men and women who are on a quest for their true selves. People nowadays come to church, prayer meetings, and Bible studies expecting an experience.

George Gallop Jr. said in his book, *The Next American Spirituality*: “The idea that one path is as meaningful as the next has shaped American religious experience profoundly. Certainly the rise of pluralism, the sheer expansion of options, has aided this.” He said, “People are less likely to turn to a church or religious institution, more apt to depend on self-help books or tips from talk shows to arrive at their beliefs.” Gallop likewise mentioned that “well over twenty-three percent of Americans believe in astrology and over twenty-five percent believe in the Eastern religious concept of reincarnation despite the fact that a large majority identify themselves as Christians.”¹

Dr. Mike Chapman, senior pastor of City Church in Chattanooga, TN, said in a taped interview, “There have been two major philosophical changes over the past 50 years in America – i.e., the death of Christendom as a major influence and the death of modernism.” Dr. Chapman said that Christendom formerly exerted a great influence on culture and society, but it has been “dead” in the United States since the 1960s. He observed that there are churches that are doing ministry with the presumption that the American culture is still “defacto Christianized.” He warned that, “These churches have become irrelevant and are looked upon with scorn.”²

Dr. Chapman also said that modernism has been “dead” in America and in other nations since the 1980s. “There are no more absolutes today – no one knows what the truth is. Postmodern people think that there are different paths to spirituality and each one is as good as the others. Reasoning and the scientific method have given way to experience.”³

Gallop says that “One third of Americans claim to have had a spiritual experience that touches them deeply, but much contemporary spirituality stops with experience and dispenses with reflection. There is an elevation of experience over belief.⁴ The escape Pentecostals offer is “not an escape from the real world but rather, into the ultimate reality” found only in Christ.⁵ Our experiences must continue to be biblically based and led by the Holy Spirit.

Doctors Jackie and Cheryl Johns said that the Holy Spirit would teach us by “bringing experiential knowledge of God.” They explained that the Hebrew word that is transliterated as “Yada” focuses on knowledge that comes through experience. They said, “One learns about God by encountering God and responding appropriately out of that encounter.” The authors quoted Thomas Groome who said that “knowing” was to be “more by the heart than by the mind.”⁶

Another avenue that Pentecostals can use to reach postmodern people would be their seeming lack of hope. The modernist worldview was that “science would sooner or later find a solution to problems of ill health, poverty, suffering and war, yet, as the twentieth century progressed, the modernist’s hopes were shattered. The myth of scientific progress is dead. The Postmodern worldview is based on the failure of modernism.”⁷

Pentecostals can therefore share hope to the hopeless! We have the message of hope in Christ and the reality of the Holy Spirit’s power as evidenced by signs and wonders. This message of hope can become an anchor where the postmodern person can cling on amidst the chaos of his or her personal life. Science may have failed us but Christ will never fail!

In order to effectively communicate the Gospel in this postmodern world, ministers today must seek to understand the philosophical parameters that affect the mindset of their hearers. The Scriptures warn us, however, in Matthew 9:17 not to put new wine into old wineskins or else the wineskins will break. We must thus be willing to radically follow the Holy Spirit’s leading in having a seeker-sensitive ministry without the trap of institutionalism – i.e. the use of old and antiquated religious practices that may no longer be relevant to un-reached, twenty-first century people.

II. THE EFFECTS OF THE DISORIENTATION OF LIFE IN URBAN AMERICA

A recent article in the National Geographic (dated November 2002) reported that “by the year 2030, sixty percent of the world’s people will be living in cities.” These cities will be very large ones. A “mega-city” is defined as an urban area that has more than ten million inhabitants. According to information from the United Nations, there were fourteen mega-cities in 1995 but in 2015 there will be twenty-one. This article said, “The number of urban areas with populations between five and ten million will shoot from seven to thirty-seven. This growth will occur mainly in developing countries, those least equipped to provide transportation, housing, water, and sewers.”⁸

The United States Census Bureau reports that 80.3 percent of Americans or 226 million people lived in metropolitan areas. It also said 54 percent of the 281.4 million people counted in the United States (in Census 2000) live in the top ten most populous states. New York was the most populous metropolitan area with 21.2 million people while Los Angeles metropolitan area was second largest with a population of 16.4 million.”⁹

Bill Easum estimates that eighty percent of United States churches are located in sparsely populated areas instead of in the urban areas where the vast majority of people live today.

Easum emphasized that instead of building churches we must focus on penetrating the city. “We must focus on penetrating urban life and reaching city dwellers. We must ...plant churches in the urban areas of dense population.” Easum said some think that there are too many churches. On the contrary, Easum said, “...at the turn of the century, there was a church for every 500 people whereas today there is one church for every 2,000 people.”¹⁰

One of the best ways to reach the people in our cities is to know their felt needs. John Dawson, in his book *Taking Our Cities for God*, listed these twelve factors that contribute to the disorientation of modern city dwellers:¹¹

1. **They feel powerless**—Authority is distant and impersonal.
2. **They feel alone**—The great majority of people are total strangers to the individual.
3. **They feel vulnerable**—Culture, race, and language are not bases for security.
4. **They feel lost**—Nationwide urban uniformity dwarfs regional culture.
5. **They feel controlled**—Urban people have their senses bombarded by media.

6. **They feel rejected**—Family proximity only comes as a result of conscious effort.
7. **They feel bewildered**—Decision making over many options leads to anxiety.
8. **They feel foolish**—Information overload has dulled appetite for true understanding.
9. **They feel insecure**—Nearly all friendships are short-term.
10. **They feel used**—They are only valued for their labor, and can be rejected if they fail.
11. **They feel anxiety & stress**—They are surrounded by restless activity for success.
12. **They feel void of meaning**—Public values are based on consumption/production.

Floyd McClung Jr., said, “Ministry and life in the city is a learning process. We learn about cultures, people, life, pain, ourselves, failure, . . . And, if we learn all these lessons along the way, we will learn to be God’s answer to others. An entrance strategy to urban missions is to have “genuine love for people, faith in God in spite of great need and giving up our rights”¹² “The heart of urban strategy is bringing people to Christ.”¹³

This agrees with what Roger Greenway wrote about how to succeed in the city. Greenway said that we must spend time ministering to people outside the church’s membership. He said that those who want to succeed in urban ministry...¹⁴

1. Must learn to love the city and its people
2. Must get to know the city
3. Must learn to appreciate the body of Christ that exists in the city
4. Must hurt for the city
5. Must possess a deep and genuine passion for evangelism
6. Must build genuine credibility

Ministry to urbanites in America (and in other world cities) must start with the compassion poured into the minister's heart from the heart of Christ. It must be undergirded by discernment that comes from the Holy Spirit with regard to the spiritual dynamics that are working within the city. Floyd McClung, Jr. says that "Each city has its spiritual dynamics, but the spiritual life of some cities...reach beyond their geographic location."¹⁵ McClung also said in another book that "Exercising the gift of discernment of spirits is crucial. We must know if we are battling demonic powers or dealing just with sin and its consequences in the culture." He says further that, "I have found that a relationship usually exists between demonic bondage in a city or nation and the sins that have been committed there on a large scale in the past." He suggested that we must research the issues

that weaken the influence of the Gospel in the city by carefully listening to what God has on His heart for our cities.¹⁶

Urban church planters must therefore be empowered by the Holy Spirit to discern the needs of the residents of that city and identify the spiritual dynamics affecting the spread of the Gospel of Christ there. There is a need to identify with the residents of the city.

This calls for a holistic ministry that empathizes with their struggles and pains; one that does not ignore the marginalized such as the poor, the immigrants, the single parents etc. It must somehow reach relationally to those whose lives are broken by alcohol, drugs, lust, fear, etc. Easum says that many twentieth century conversions were dramatic, “Damascus-road” experiences, though the gradual, Emmaus experience best describes conversion today. Effective evangelism relies on long-term relationships and growth processes not rallies or programs.¹⁷

III. EFFECTS OF DEMOGRAPHIC CHANGES IN URBAN AMERICA

The United States Census Bureau reported that there were a total of 281.4 million people who were counted in the United States of America as of the year 2000.¹⁸

The chart in Table 1 shows the major ethnic groups in the United States in the year 2000.

The United States population is still predominantly “white” (i.e. of Anglo Saxon heritage) although the Hispanic population has grown to 35.3 million making them the largest single “minority” racial group in the United States (as compared to 34.6 million African Americans). Missions’ consultant, Arturo Lucero says that new immigrants are coming into America (legally or illegally) at the rate of 125,000 a month. He says that about sixty percent of the nation’s thirty-three million immigrants live in the ten largest United States metropolitan areas such as New York, Miami, Chicago, or Los Angeles.¹⁹

Reverend Dan Sandoval, assistant pastor of Cooper City Church of God (Florida) said: “The spectrum of (the) territory is widening every month. Hispanics, Jamaicans, Brazilians are making their presence known in the community. We need to take note of these (demographic) changes, wake up to it and recognize that they are part of the harvest.”²⁰ Reverend Dwight Allen, the senior pastor of Cooper City Church of God for the past eighteen years reported that, at present, there are forty-four different nationalities in their congregation.²¹

Table 1

United States POPULATION (2000) based on Ethnicity²²

Racial Grouping	Number of People	%
White	211,460,626	75.1
African American	34,658,190	12.3
Asian	10,242,998	3.6
American Indian/Alaskan	2,475,956	0.9
Hawaiian/ other Pacific Islanders	398,835	0.1
Some other race	15,359,073	5.5
Two or more races	<u>6,826,228</u>	<u>2.4</u>
TOTALS	<u>281,421,906</u>	<u>100.0</u>
Hispanics/Latinos	35,305,818	12.5
Non-Hispanic	<u>246,116,088</u>	<u>87.5</u>
TOTALS	<u>281,421,906</u>	<u>100.0</u>

IV. ADAPTING TO DEMOGRAPHIC CHANGES:THE NEED FOR STRATEGIC CHURCH MISSIOLOGY

How then should churches respond to these demographic changes in North America? What church planting strategies are needed in addressing the challenges and opportunities that have come as a result of these demographic changes?

The Lausanne Covenant states "...the whole church must take the whole Gospel to the whole world.²³ Christ commissions all believers in Matthew 28:18-20 to go and make disciples of all nations."

The Greek word "εθνος" (i.e. "ethnos") refers to race, tribe, people, family of people, and clan or sub-clan.²⁴ Christ mandates us to bring His Gospel to every people group in the world. Oftentimes, believers interpret the Great Commission merely as a call to go overseas to some unreached tribal group. That aspect of world missions is important; however, we must realize that there are great multitudes of people who are flocking to the major urban centers of the world. The crowded cities of the world are the mission fields of today. The great masses of people in the cities provide us with the greatest opportunity for reaching every εθνος for Christ.

Dr. Donnie W. Smith (state overseer of Florida-Tampa) said, "God has brought the world to our church doorsteps."²⁵ Missions consultant Arturo Lucero told *Christianity Today* that "American cities and towns are undergoing an explosion of immigrants, refugees, and changed lives." He said, "Jesus gave the church two mandates: evangelize all peoples and love all peoples. We need to

follow Jesus even if we have to move beyond our ethnic comfort zones.”²⁶

The United States Census Bureau reports that most of the major cities of the United States have become greatly diversified ethnically. Major metropolitan areas in the United States have gone through significant demographic changes through the influx of immigrants from various nations (see Table 1). Dr. Donnie Smith said, “In today’s America, whites remain the majority but by the middle of the twenty-first century, they will enter the arena of minority status. In America, tomorrow’s ministry will be multicultural.”²⁷

How are pastors of evangelical churches responding to this new challenge and opportunity? Will churches embrace these changes and grow numerically or will they resist these changes thus becoming stale and isolated from the realities around them?

Pastor Dwight Allen said, “The church leadership must be envisioned with passion from the harvest. It is as simple as caring about people no matter what their culture. A burden to reach different people groups must begin with the pastor. It must be a passion driven by the Holy Spirit.”²⁸

What church planting strategies would address this growth in ethnically diverse urban centers within the United States? Let us examine the following strategies:

**URBAN STRATEGY #1:
Integration vs. Independence**

Cooper City Church of God has succeeded in integrating different ethnically diverse people into their worship services. This is different from the concept that Donnie Smith advocates in his book, *The Undiscovered Harvest*. Dr. Smith cited the example of Mountain West Church of God in Stone Mountain, Georgia as a unique model for the establishment of a (multicultural) church within a church, one wherein a host church willingly shares its facilities with another cultural group. He said its success relies upon the host congregation's deep appreciation for the diversity of cultures.²⁹

Dr. Grant McClung quoted Dr. Peter Wagner who called this approach the "Multi-congregational church planting model" where equally independent congregations share the same facilities of a church. "Each congregation has its own pastor and staff, different council, and a separate budget yet it shares the same building with the other(s)."³⁰

What strategy will work in urban church planting here in twenty-first century America? What would be better: integration or independence?

Would the integration of ethnically diverse people groups into one congregation be better than allowing for the establishment of independent ethnic churches using common church facilities?

The integrated multi-cultural church structure of the Cooper City Church of God in Florida is a good example of the Biblical model found in the New Testament, particularly as we study the early church in the book of Acts.

Reverend Sandoval said this model of integration starts with the philosophy that “we are one church of many nations working and worshipping as one body and serving one God.” Reverend Allen said that having separate services for each ethnic group causes growth only up to a certain point. Usually there is little leadership training in these ethnic churches because the ethnic pastor gets too busy. With little leadership training, the congregation members are not able to break free from the hold of secular culture wherein they think that “they are the boss.” They “eat” their pastors (figuratively speaking) instead of getting involved in ministry.³¹

Reverend Allen shared his strategy of deliberately integrating the different ethnic groups within Cooper City Church of God:³²

1. Integration within the service of songs, Scriptures, and prayers in different languages
2. Integration of church leaders from different ethnic backgrounds in the church council
3. Integration of pastors with varied ethnic backgrounds within the pastoral staff
4. Integration of singers from varied ethnic backgrounds into an international choir
5. Integration of church members through shared meals and joint activities

Doing ministry cross-culturally requires intentional planning. Reverend Allen says that he intentionally includes a few praise and worship songs in different languages (such as Spanish) during the worship services of Cooper City Church of God.

Reverend Allen also involves his ethnically diverse pastoral staff in reading Scriptures or praying in languages other than English during the worship service.

As of 2003, the ethnically diverse Cooper City Church of God pastors were as follows:³³

1. Pastor Sandoval, Assistant Pastor (Filipino)
2. Pastor Moreira, Minister of Music (Brazilian)
3. Pastor Morerro, Spanish services (Hispanic)
4. Pastor Crick, CE & Administration (British-born in India)
5. Pastor Vallotton, Italian services (Italian)

Aside from modeling this openness to cultural diversity, Reverend Allen intentionally involves his congregation in various activities that allows for different cultures to mingle. He says that he has learned from Filipinos how to use fellowship dinners to enhance fellowship.

Reverend Allen also incorporates what he calls “non-spiritual stuff” such as games, etc. into these once-a-month dinners. He encourages one group of ethnic people to mingle with another group with a different ethnic background (such as the Jamaicans sponsoring the Hispanics, etc).

Another key strategy that is being used in Cooper City Church of God is the incorporation of church leaders from different ethnic backgrounds in the church leadership board. The chairman of the church council is a Spirit-filled medical

doctor from Trinidad and Tobago. Reverend Sandoval said that there are strengths in coming together as one church including having bigger resources and more opportunities for individuals to grow. The pastors tailor ministry around the strengths of these ethnic groups. They then reach out to their own people.³⁴

Dwight Allen said, “Cross-cultural evangelism will not occur unless you build a spiritual mandate based on the Word of God. The leader must teach his/her congregation to look at people through the eyes of God. He sees no color, no cultural diversity, and hears no accent.”

Reverend Allen added that the church leader “simply sees a soul in need. No matter what their culture is, people have to be loved for who they are and the way they are.”³⁵

**URBAN STRATEGY #2:
Mega church vs. small group church**

Is the size of the congregation an essential component for success in planting a cross-cultural church in twenty-first century urban America? Are large mega churches or medium sized churches more effective in evangelizing and discipling postmodern urban dwellers in America?

An article in *Christianity Today* reported that in 1999, forty-three percent of Americans claimed to have attended church in the past week. This article cited statistics from the Yellow Pages that said that there were 350,000 listings for churches in the United States compared to about 300,000 twenty years ago. It also quoted Lyle Schaller who said that the average church size has tripled in the past century. Schaller said: "Many people are attending larger, mega-churches."³⁶

Ralph Neighbour, Jr. said that "Mega-churches" are the most popular form of traditional church life today." He observed, however, that "These city-wide congregations have bled the life out of neighborhood churches. Plush, ornate auditoriums, and subsidized ski trips for Yuppies appeal to the social side of Americans, but do little to touch the broken lives of the unchurched. These churches attract some who desire to 'get lost' in the largeness..." He added that "Since their activities are extremely building-centered, they choke off growth by growing large enough that they can no longer afford to add further space to their facilities."³⁷

"A five-year study of the Hartford Institute for Religious Research examined 14,301 churches from 41 Christian denominations. This study

reported that fifty percent of the congregations in the United States have fewer than 100 regularly participating adults. Fifty-two percent were located in small towns and rural settings. It also pointed out that only six percent of these churches have more than 1,000 active members."³⁸

An article in the Asian Journal of Pentecostal Studies reported that in 1999, there were nearly 400 large churches and 15 mega-churches in Korea (i.e. those with at least 12,000 adults in attendance).

The Yoido Full Gospel Church of Pastor Cho Yong-gi led this list of mega-churches with 230,000 adult attendees.³⁹ The Korean model of church growth through cell groups has elicited a lot of academic interests. The Asian cultural mindset is different from that of North Americans and thus, we must see if this model for church growth applies in the United States.

Pastor Gabor, Senior Pastor of Filipino Christian Center, noted however that "Small groups don't fit to the American culture."⁴⁰ Joel Comiskey's case study of eight cell churches worldwide (with adult memberships of 7,000 or more) included Bethany World Prayer Center in Baker, Louisiana which Comiskey called the premier United States cell church.⁴¹

Ralph Neighbour Jr., identified Portland's New Hope Community Church, under Pastor Gale Galloway as an example of a successful cell group church here in the United States.⁴² Cell based churches can thus thrive here in the United States in spite of most Americans' desire for privacy and individualistic pursuits.

Bill Easum said that, "The further we move into the twenty-first century, the more important the relational, affirmational, contextual, and group evangelism will become."⁴³

It is said that 75 million Americans regularly find strength in a small group source.⁴⁴ Urban church planting in twenty-first century America will thus be best achieved through the use of small groups.

**URBAN STRATEGY #3:
Focusing on key age groups vs. the "shotgun approach"**

George Barna shared these United States Census statistics for five generations of Americans. The Data appears in Table 2.

Table 2

Population Data for 5 Generations of Americans⁴⁵

<u>Generation Size</u>	<u>Years of Birth</u>	<u>Age Range in 1998</u>	<u>Population</u>
Seniors	1926 and earlier	72 years and older	19.9 million
Builders	1927-1945	53 to 71 years	39.8 million
Boomers	1946-1964	34 to 52 years	73.1 million
Busters	1965-1983	15 to 33 years	72.3 million
Mosaics	1984-2002	14 and younger	61.7 million

Biblical churches need to be multi-cultural and multi-generational; however, it would be wise for the urban church planter to reach out to the age range where a greater number of people can be found. The figures in table two show that most of the United States population ranges from fifteen to fifty-two years.

Churches that strategically reach out to the “Busters” and the “Boomers” would have greater opportunities for numerical growth although it would come with even greater challenges for the church to be relevant amidst the plurality of choices that they have today. George Barna reported that “compared to teens throughout the past 20 years, today’s teenagers have the lowest likelihood of attending church when

they are living independent of their parents.”⁴⁶ Strategically reaching youths and young adults through meaningful relationships and relevant messages shared with excellence can thus result in successful urban church planting.

V. KEY MINISTRY PARAMETERS IN TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY URBAN AMERICA

This study has provided an analysis of the situation facing church planters today in North American urban areas. Considerable discussion has been made on the changes in the philosophical mindset of Americans today that show a preference for the plurality of choices and the avoidance of commitments to moral absolutes. This situation produces a “God-sized” vacuum in the hearts of twenty-first century Americans that cannot be satisfied by experiences of pleasure from drugs, alcohol, sex outside marriage, and even with experimentation in Eastern religions. Only God can fill that “God-sized vacuum” in their hearts and thus, the evangelical church must be quick and purposeful in seeking to reach out beyond the normal boundaries of the “churched” population towards the millions of “unchurched” people who need Christ.

Pentecostals have a distinct advantage in reaching postmodern Americans who are focused on finding truth through experience rather than through academic pursuits. Pentecostals who are operating in the gifting of the Holy Spirit can minister to the seekers' needs through discernment and through the manifestation of signs and wonders.

The growth of urban centers throughout the world and in the United States likewise provides opportunities for us to reach out to the brokenness and isolation that twenty-first century urbanites feel. This necessitates the use of relational evangelism and discipleship that is best achieved through small groups. The unsaved person needs to know that believers care enough about their needs.

Likewise, church planters must strategically reach out to the growing ranks of youths and young adults by sharing relevant, need-meeting Gospel messages through the effective use of technological tools and communication media that are available today. We must build trust relationships so that these "Busters" and "Boomers" will choose to listen to the message so that Christ can transform their lives and give them hope, relevance, and significance in Him.

In short, the key components for effective church planting should ideally be:

1. **Urban**
2. **Multi-cultural**
3. **Holistic**
4. **Based on small groups**

Effective ministry in the twenty-first century will not be personality-centered and church building-centered. The Great Commission can only be fulfilled if the whole Church will implement the four elements of this key strategy. Church planting needs:

- to be prayerfully and strategically planned
- to target the masses of people in key urban areas
- to focus on the mobilization of lay ministers
- relational Evangelism & Discipleship through small groups

How can we proclaim the gospel to as many people as we can before Christ returns to earth as the righteous judge? In order to reach all the people groups we need to focus on church planting in key urban areas of the world.

A report in *National Geographic* said, “By the year 2030, for the first time in history, sixty percent of the world’s people will be living in cities.” It went on to define a “mega-city” as one with a population of ten million inhabitants or more.

This report also cited data from the United Nations population division that showed that as of 1995, there were fourteen mega-cities. In 2015, there will be twenty-one. The number of cities with populations between five to ten million will shoot from seven to thirty-seven by 2015. Tokyo had the highest population in 2000 with 26.4 million people.⁴⁷

In the book, *Cities: Mission's New Frontier*, Timothy Monsma stated,

“Missions during the twenty-first century must face the fact that the majority of the world’s population increasingly will be living in cities. Cities are to be the target of mission penetration not only because more ethnic groups once living in rural areas now have representatives in big cities; ...also because cities contain many social groups that have not yet been reached with the Gospel. Furthermore, cities are centers of dominance and therefore are the pace setters for a society. If numerous groups in the giant cities of the world receive the Gospel, the good news of God’s salvation may then spread from city to city just as it did in New Testament times.”⁴⁸

It is crucial therefore that church planters must avoid the “white flight to the suburbs” which has prevailed in many of the cities in North America. Many of the twentieth century church planters and pastors have consciously or unconsciously moved away from doing ministry within the heart of today’s sprawling

cities and have instead opted for building churches in the more comfortable suburbs.

This observation was confirmed by a study dated March 2001 entitled “A Report on Religion in the United States Today” conducted by the Hartford Institute for Religious Research done on 14,301 congregations in forty-one denominations and faith groups. This study reported that half of all congregations surveyed had fewer than one-hundred regularly participating adults. It also reported that fifty-two percent of these congregations surveyed were located in towns and rural settings. A part of this study is seen on table three:⁴⁹

Adult attendance of 100 and below	50%
Adult attendance of 100 to 349	33%
Adult attendance of 350 to 999	11%
Adult attendance of 1000 and above	6%

Churches located in towns and rural settings	52%
Churches located in suburban areas	23%
Churches located in cities with 10,000 or more people	25%

A formal inquiry was made with the Church of God International Offices (Business and Records Department) on how Church of God congregations in the United States and Canada compared with the national survey done by the Hartford Institute. It is important to point out that the Church of God chose not to participate in this national survey of 14,301 churches in forty-one denominations that included 619 churches from the Assemblies of God.

Reverend Julian Robinson and the Business and Records Department staff collected data from 6,186 active churches in the Church of God in the United States and Canada. They reported the profile in Table 5 based on the membership size of these churches.

The results of the Hartford Institute study, as well as the data on the Church of God International congregations in North America, confirm the fact that most of the churches in the United States (and Canada) are relatively small in size, having an attendance of 100 or below.

Table 5

**CLASSIFICATION OF CHURCH OF GOD CONGREGATIONS
BASED ON THE SIZE OF THEIR AVERAGE MEMBERSHIP⁵¹**

Adult attendance of 99 members or less	3852	62.27%
Adult attendance of 100 to 199 members	1296	20.95%
Adult attendance of 200 to 499 members	803	12.98%
Adult attendance of 500 to 999 members	178	2.88%
Adult attendance of 1000 to 2999 members	50	0.81%
Adult attendance of 3000 or more members	<u>7</u>	<u>0.11%</u>
Totals	<u>6186</u>	<u>100.00%</u>

Let us briefly compare the two studies:

TABLE 6

**COMPARISON OF CHURCH OF GOD CONGREGATIONS
AND THE CHURCHES IN THE HARTFORD INSTITUTE SURVEY**

	Church of God	Hartford Survey
<i>Membership Size</i>	<i>(6,186 churches)</i>	<i>(14,301 churches)</i>
Memberships of less than 100 adults	62.27%	50%
Memberships of 1000 adults or more	0.92%	6%

There is nothing wrong with having relatively small churches. Oftentimes, people choose churches with a smaller membership size for various reasons, including the closer relational bonds that characterize such churches.

Pastors and church members need to look outwardly beyond the walls of their churches and trust God for a greater harvest of unsaved people. Church planting among the unsaved and unchurched of North America needs to be done deliberately and strategically in order for the collective Body of Christ to make an impact on the communities where God has placed them.

There also needs to be a deliberate church planting strategy for reaching the great multitudes of people that are moving to the urban areas in North America and in the world. We do not need to go overseas anymore to reach the “ethnos” or people groups of the world – the “world” has come to us.

God has given the Church immense opportunities to reach the lost in our own cities here in America. Ministry in North America today and in the rest of the twenty-first century will certainly be multi-cultural.

The key to doing ministry in the twenty-first century is the mobilization of lay ministers through small groups. A program that is helping pastors to transform local churches is Lay Leadership Development, produced by the Department of Ministerial Development (www.cogmd.org). This is a pastor’s program for mentoring and mobilizing laity for leadership in the

local church. This program also builds unity and a sense of teamwork between pastors and lay leaders.

Church planters must emphasize that every member is a minister. Peter wrote in 1 Peter 2:9, "...you are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood..." Understanding the priesthood of all believers is crucial to church growth. It would free the church from being "personality-centered" and free the believers from "just sitting in the pews." It would release them into fruitful ministry in their communities, schools, and workplace through the use of their spiritual gifts. Easum said: "Ministry happens when people discover their spiritual gifts instead of fulfilling roles or tasks the institution requires done...People blossom and seldom burn out when they begin to use their skills on behalf of the Body of Christ. Permission-giving churches have leaders who are secure enough to equip others for ministry..."⁵²

Easum gave this key statement about doing ministry through permission-giving churches:

"Permission-giving churches believe that the role of God's people is to minister to people, in the world, every day of the week, by living out their spiritual gifts instead of running the church by sitting on committees and making decisions about what can or cannot be done."⁵³

The small group model is an effective means of relational discipleship and evangelism primarily because we were made with a desire for relationships within the context of a loving, caring, encouraging community. Michael Anthony said: “There is something about a small group setting that stimulates us at the core of our being.”

“God created us to be relational, i.e. to crave interaction with our own kind. People participating in a small group feel wanted when there is a feeling that no one objects to their presence, that they are sincerely welcome, that they are honestly needed for themselves. The creation of emotional security in a small group, brought about by unconditional love and acceptance, releases people to praise God and grow together. Small groups become safe havens to express struggles.”⁵⁴

People in small groups learn to love God and love one another. People want to be wanted. The world today is marked by loneliness brought about by the interplay of the following sociological changes in our society:⁵⁵

1. The Changing Family:
In many cultures, there has been a move from the extended family to the nuclear family to the fractured family.
2. The Disappearance of Neighborhoods:
People do not want to be involved with their neighbors. They want their privacy.
3. The Fragmentation of our lives:

Today we live fragmented lives in which we know people only in a single sphere instead of multiple levels of interaction with same people.

4. The Mobility of our society:
Long-term relationships are fewer. One out of five families move every year. The depth of sharing is often shallow in quick friendships. The church depends on long lasting relationships.
5. The Urbanization of our society:
The move of our society to the city and suburbs has caused us to be less friendly, simply because we cannot relate to so many people. (Many are lonely in big cities.)
6. The Spectator Culture:
People who watch TV hour after hour tend to become passive. The computer, video, etc, provide an escape from reality and from thinking about life's problems.

The search for community and for the sacred will continue to characterize the American people. People today long for a sense of connection to God and other people.⁵⁶

Forty percent of adults in the United States claim membership in a small group for regular support and care. Roughly seventy-five to eighty million Americans regularly find strength in a small group source. Four adults in ten appear to be involved in some kind of group (or eighty out of two-hundred million adults). In addition to the forty percent who are currently involved, another fifteen percent have been in a group in the past; twenty-four of those who are not currently involved say they would

like to join one. It certainly suggests that the small group movement has become a major feature of the American life.⁵⁷ The above mentioned statistics indicate that a growing number of Americans are willing to meet others in small interest groups.

This interest, however, may not necessarily extend to matters related to their spiritual well being. Therefore, it is not enough for existing churches to react to this growing interest in small groups by starting interest groups just to fill these perceived needs. Pastors must become mentors and motivators of members and involve people in team ministry according to their gifts and passion.

We need a reorientation of the Church's core values and ministry approach. Not all churches that have small groups are actually operating as a "small group church." Reverend Lawrence Khong of Singapore explained that cells or small groups in a "cell church" are the heart of the church and not just another program. He said,

"There is a vast difference between a church with cells and a cell church...We don't do anything else except the cell. All the things the church must do – training, equipping, discipleship, evangelism, prayer, worship – are done through the cell. Our Sunday service is just the corporate celebration."⁵⁸

John Wesley was the pioneer of small-group evangelism. By the end of the eighteenth century, Wesley had developed more than 10,000 cells (classes) participated in by thousands of people.⁵⁹

Cell groups will thrive when there is a focus on prayerfully inviting unsaved friends and loved ones to meet in a non-threatening environment such as homes, offices, and schools etc.

Is the size of the congregation an essential component for success in planting a cross-cultural church in twenty-first century urban America? Are large mega churches or medium sized churches more effective in evangelizing and discipling postmodern urban dwellers in America?

Various churches worldwide have also successfully adopted the small group (or cell church) model such as is shown in Table 7.

Cell based churches can thrive here in the United States in spite of most Americans' desire for privacy and individualistic pursuits. Bill Easum said, "The further we move into the twenty-first century, the more important the relational, affirmational, contextual, and group evangelism will become."⁶⁰

Table 7

**CELL CHURCHES
STUDIED BY J. COMISKEY⁶¹**

Church Name	Location	Cells	Worshippers
Bethany World Prayer Center	Louisiana	500	7,000
Christian Center of Guayaquil	Ecuador	2,000	7,000
Elim Church	El Salvador	5,500	35,000
Faith Community Baptist	Singapore	550	6,500
International Charismatic	Columbia	13,000	35,000
Love Alive Church	Honduras	1,000	7,000
Living Water Church	Peru	600	7,000
Yoido Full Gospel Church	S. Korea	23,000	153,000

CONCLUSION

Urban church planting in twenty-first century America will thus be best achieved through the use of small groups. “Sociologists and historians have pointed out that the twenty-first century world will look much like that of the first century. It will be a time of rapid urbanization, of moral decay and increasing religious plurality. This is just the type of “soil” that the early church thrived in, as it spread from house to house across the Roman Empire.”⁶²

The mobilization of lay ministers through small groups will continue providing supernatural successes in urban church planting and church growth in South American, Asia, Africa, and in many other countries in the world like the United States, as the Holy Spirit enables and empowers willing vessels with His anointing and grace. The involvement of lay ministers in caring for and equipping believers, along with evangelizing the unsaved, can only be done through the manifestation and operation of the gifts of the Holy Spirit.

Peter Wagner wrote: “Pentecostal churches grow when the Holy Spirit is free to manifest His miracle power through believers.” Wagner characterizes Pentecostal churches as churches of:

- 1. Purity**
- 2. Prayer**
- 3. Power**
- 4. Poor⁶³**

Spirit-filled churches that maintain these four Pentecostal distinctives will continue leading the Church in passionately reaching the lost as we await the imminent return of Christ.

In Matthew 16:18, Jesus reminded Peter that He will build His church and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it. As we seek to fulfill Christ’s Great Commission found in Matthew

28:18-20, Jesus assures all believers that we can “Go with His Power, His Plan, and His Presence;” which is the true secret of church planting and growth.

Endnotes

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³³ I was a part of the pastoral staff of the Cooper City Church of God from Feb. to May 2000. Prior to joining the Cooper City COG pastoral staff I was one of several pastors using their church facilities for independent church services. Reverend Dwight Allen embraced my Filipino heritage and intentionally encouraged ethnic diversity within his congregation. He also opened his church facilities to a Korean Pentecostal pastor and a Filipino Baptist pastor. As of 2005, the new Hispanic pastor is Reverend Jorge Andrade. Rev. Sandoval is no longer with the Cooper City Church of God. [Database available online from <http://www.cccofgod.org/pastors.html>.]

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Applications are open for the Global Internship program you can call it GIST it is one of the most renowned program. Global Intern Program is designed to provide knowledge and skills in the areas of: School of Electrical Engineering and Computer Science. School of Materials Science and Engineering. The Ministerial Credentialing Office oversees the Internship Grant Program in order to support new teaching sites to provide internship salaries during their first year or two. Since good teaching sites are always in great demand, it is hoped that following this initial assistance, the congregation will want to continue to support their internship program independently, thereby making it possible for a congregation to host interns in the years to come. The Intern Programme isn't your average tea-making, hand-holding internship. It's your chance to join a team where you will work on real projects from the start. Develop your natural talents and build experience that will change how you look at everything, from smartphones to search engines. We are hiring interns across all of our business areas. So, whatever your skill set, we have an internship programme that will challenge and develop your current capabilities. Our Internship Programmes. Commercial Internship. The Ministerial Internship time assists pre-ordination/commission candidates in obtaining practical field exposure to the various aspects of gospel ministry. Conferences shall place ministerial interns where there is a prospect for a well-rounded development in all the phases of the ministry—evangelistic, pastoral, teaching (i.e personal and group instruction) and various departmental activities. Internship Programs Internship Programs. How to Identify a Shady Internship. Not all internships are created equal. Some positions that might look like internships are really just part-time temp jobs available to almost anyone. They may even be unchallenging busywork that an employer would rather not assign to staff. You might get paid at this type of job, but chances are slim you'll rack up good