

**MentorNet #22**  
**Helping Church Leaders to Develop a Cellular  
Church Body — Part 2 of 2**

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Download Part 1 (MentorNet # 21) from <http://www.MentorNet.ws>.

Guidelines 1–4 were explained in *Part 1*, MentorNet # 21. They dealt with:

1. Let members discover the joy of meeting with a group small enough to practice the kind of edifying interaction that Jesus and His apostles want for us.
2. Begin groups with an organizational structure and a curriculum that are entirely new and radically New Testament.
3. Allow small groups to take to themselves many of the functions and privileges of traditional pastors.
4. Start small groups as a means of discipling seekers and new believers, rather than as a way of causing numerical growth.

**5. Let small group participation be voluntary.**

- **Let small group participation be spontaneous.** Let older believers who are indifferent to small groups “lie in green pastures beside still waters.” Forcing them into face-to-face “growth” breeds stagnant groups that die without reproducing. If older believers feel no desire for a small group experience, or have so many activities that they resist “one more thing to do”, then they will try out small groups with a reluctance that can quickly turn into revulsion. This is particularly so where members are assigned to a group by a clergyman who drew zone lines on a map.
- **Keep the entire congregation aware of what God is doing in the small groups.** One way to encourage small group workers is to interview briefly, during the congregational worship time, individuals who have had spiritual victories in their small groups. Even where group members find some affinity one for another, and make the group part of their busy lives, groups can stagnate if left to their own devices without continual, fresh input and encouragement from their pastors through their small shepherds or hosts.

**6. Small group shepherds can help older believers to grow in their practice of church body life, as they receive on-going guidance from church leaders.**

- **Equip the members of the body.** This is the primary task of teachers and pastors. Ephesians 4:11-16 requires pastors and others to train and model mature Christian life. They can do this more effectively in a congregation that has multiple “elders” or group shepherds who receive regular coaching from more experienced pastors.
- **Listen to those whom you coach before telling them what to do.** Pastors who coach small group shepherds must listen to them often and help them to serve their groups. Respond to urgent issues, and add to group activities more of the kinds of “one-another” ministries that the New Testament requires.

**7. Start small and reproduce the first group or groups.**

- **Develop your own forms and methods.** Many cultural variables prohibit one church from merely adopting the forms and methods of another church, especially a culturally-distant one. Every shepherd will have to try different things, develop what works, and grow in his own coaching skills and mentoring wisdom.

- **Start three groups at about the same time if possible.** This has some advantages. Even if one or two disband, there is still a group. A pastor can meet with more than one group shepherd for mentoring, and have time to hear from all of them, give them advice, and make plans with them for their groups. It will become clear faster, what kinds of group activities meet needs and lead to the starting of new groups. Furthermore, the group leaders can encourage and counsel one another.
- **Aim to reproduce.** From the very start, let each group shepherd share the vision to lead his group to help start another group. Seldom do groups start another one by splitting, for it is too hard to break up the friendships. Usually, group members start new, smaller groups with others, while maintaining ties with their first group. Groups and their shepherds should envision and pray to make that happen continually. Often those who start a new group never leave the original one. They simply visit friends to win them to Christ, and train new leaders in the new group, while remaining with the original group. This is similar to what Paul and Barnabas did; they started many churches but kept returning to their home church in Antioch.

#### 8. Start with new believers, where there are any.

- **Let new believers start immediately to form new groups.** Even traditional congregations sometimes see folks come to salvation. Where new believers have no other opportunity but to sit on pews once a week and listen to sermons, they are not likely to bring seekers with them.
- **Let each new believer be a doorway to many other neglected people.** Where every new believer is seen as a member of a family and a circle of existing friends, they should be viewed as the door into a potential new cell. So you should coach shepherds in how to encourage new believers to identify those of their acquaintances who might be interested to hear about their new life with Jesus. Shepherds should also coach those new ones to witness and pray for their relatives and friends.

#### 9. Allow rustic believers to take leadership from the start.

- **Recognize the gift of leadership when it emerges.** Often people will emerge, as Cornelius did, whom God affirmed as a spiritual man even before he knew Jesus. While the New Testament sets standards for ordination as an elder, the Holy Spirit often distributes pastoral gifts even to immature believers. Where these “diamonds in the rough” are able to bring others together, share with them and care for them, pastors should treat them as apprentice shepherds and coach them in pastoral duties.
- **Hold up to new shepherds the possibility of becoming elders.** Let them view church leadership as something to be developed, while serving with all the love and skill that God gives to them for their small groups. Some may eventually leave shepherding to others, while others will become competent pastors or elders.

#### 10. Provide regular, patient coaching, in addition to training seminars.

- **Include mentoring of group shepherds in your list of primary pastoral duties.** Where a pastor is too insecure or unskilled to mentor others, he should assign that training task to another, perhaps a staff member or associate missionary, and show frequent, public support of that helper’s work.

- **Maintain a balance between mentoring and classroom training.** Rapid cell multiplication requires training new leaders the way Jesus and the apostles did it. Pastors who rely mainly on big-group training classes for small group leaders will be disappointed, for shepherding is not so much an academic subject as it is a relational skill with a God-given desire to see others grow in faith and obedience. This skill cannot only be taught, but it can be modelled.
- **Avoid over-training with too much information.** Experienced trainers have found that providing information before workers see a need of it, will require you to train again later when the need becomes apparent. Furthermore, learning without implementation often leads to a haughty attitude and unwillingness to listen later.

#### 11. Keep group leaders focussed on the commands of Jesus and the New Testament.

- **Focus primarily on obeying New Testament directives.** Western pastors who are educated in theology, management practices, and popular psychology, tend to demonstrate doctrinal precision, elegant social customs, and domesticated personality traits. They often like to preach about these things and seek them in others. However, Jesus and the New Testament put far more emphasis on spiritual power, on obedience to the commandments of Christ, and on showing of grace and love one's fellow believers, neighbours and enemies.
- **Keep coming back to those directives.** There are enough explicit New Testament guidelines to keep every group and its shepherd quite busy growing in faith and obedience for over a year, without demanding that they adopt or demonstrate non-biblical cultural ideals.

#### 12. Form groups mainly from existing relationships.

- **Keep new believers in a loving relationship with their relatives and friends.** In the Book of Acts, historically, and as a usual pattern across cultures, new groups of believers are formed mainly by new believers drawing relatives, associates and friends into their group and to faith in Jesus. Pastors who will let such natural bridges serve as paths for supernatural faith will see more growth, over time, than will those who depend on public evangelistic meetings.
- **Avoid forcing new believers to meet together with people with whom they normally would not associate.** Groups of new believers that are least likely to grow and reproduce are those that have been forced together by a pastor or missionary for his own convenience, or as a social statement about inter-cultural unity. There are better ways to express Christian unity than by disallowing growth through normal relationships, thereby requiring cultural suicide in order to become a follower of Jesus.

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