

MentorNet # 20  
**Myths and Facts about Church and Cell Reproduction**

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Our mentoring and training expose us to many ideas and practices that have proved helpful to someone, somewhere at some point in history. Some of these have become widely accepted with time. However, these may not be universally applicable, and must be tested with Scripture and compared with observations from diverse fields.

**Myth #1:** “To start a new church or cell the church planters must leave an existing church body.”

**Fact:** In most church planting projects around the world, few workers permanently leave their ‘home’ church or cell.

- In the case of Peter and his church planting team in Acts 10, and Paul and Barnabas in Acts chapters 13 and 14, the workers did not change their membership to the new churches; they never broke their relationship with the mother churches.
- George Patterson affirms, “I cannot recall any church plant in Central America in which the responsible workers left their home church. They evangelized the new community and trained the new leaders without leaving their own church.”

**Myth #2:** “To start a new church or cell you have to ‘hive off’ a substantial number of members (‘critical mass’) from a mother church to form the core of the new body.”

**Fact:** In the church or cell reproduction that we have observed, except in urban America, that is seldom the case.

- In urban United States many new churches are started by “hiving” off numbers that are large enough to pay a pastor and practice a worship style similar to the mother church. This method is a common one for starting urban American churches. It has five weaknesses:
- It works only if a mother church is large enough to send a large number of its members to the new church. It does not work for most of the smaller, poorer and newer churches.
- It works only if the leadership is willing, which in most churches is not the case.
- It works only if transportation is convenient for a large number of people to travel to the location of the new church without changing their residence.
- It can take place with little or no evangelism. The new churches sometimes fail to do it.
- It seldom sustains the reproduction for a wide-spread movement for Christ, and, so, is seldom seen in pioneer church planting movements.

**Myth #3:** “The job of an evangelist is not done until the new believer is established in an *existing* church or cell group.”

**Fact:** The problem is with the word ‘existing.’ In rapid, healthy church or cell reproduction, workers bring new families into an existing group only as a last resort. Their first goal is normally to build a new cell (or church in a pioneer field) around the newly-believing family.

- Each new believer, especially if head of a household, opens a potential, new vein of gold.
- This vein is the existing social network of the new believer or family.
- Most Western church planters’ first impulse is to extract a new believer from his social network and help him make new friends in an existing church body.

- In the church planting movements that we observe the evangelists do their best to keep converts in a loving relationship with the people in their current networks, and let the gospel flow along the lines of their natural relationships.
- The gospel normally flows readily along the same route as gossip, from friend to friend and relative to relative.

**Myth #4:** Where churches and cells multiply rapidly, it is always necessary for new believers to find and make *new* friends soon within the congregation.

**Fact:** The problem is with the word ‘new.’ In the church and cell reproduction that we have observed, new believers have old friends who come into the new church or cell with them.

- People certainly need to have close friends in a congregation or most will leave after attending a few times. These friends, however, do not need to be new.
- If the other facts listed above are acted upon, we can build new congregations around new believers from the same vein of gold. Most of their friends in a new church or cell will be *old* friends.

**Myth #5:** “It takes lots of money to start Christian churches.

**Fact:** Although it may take money to send and support non-tent-making missionaries, churches that require no building or paid clergy will be self-supporting from the start.

- What costs a lot of money are non-biblical, Western traditions and practices. Where workers and churches can avoid or shake themselves loose from those traditions, they normally need no more resources than what are locally available.
- Western churches and missions too quickly adopt methods and requirements on mission fields that create financial dependency. This often attracts unscrupulous, power-hungry schemers who ascend to the head of new churches and organizations.

**Myth #6:** “You need a free, democratic society with freedom of religion, to start Christian churches.

**Fact:** Throughout history and round the world today, except in traditionally-Christian areas, most churches start under hostile conditions.

- Jesus and his apostles set the example by their radical faith and willingness to suffer persecution to advance the gospel and start churches in new culture groups.
- People around the globe suffer all kinds of abuse at the hands of their governments and of local rebel movements. To suffer for righteousness brings more of the same abuse, but also an eternal reward.

**Myth #7:** “You need highly educated and trained church planters to start quality churches that will be doctrinally sound and long-lasting.

**Fact:** Experience and scientific studies alike have shown that, for church planters who are educated far beyond the people they work with, the higher educational level more often than not hinders church growth and reproduction!

- Even more important is that church planters be culturally similar to new believers and enjoy freedom to start churches, unfettered by church traditions that allow only the clergy to perform the activities that Jesus commanded all his followers to do.

- What is consistently helpful is that existing church planters and leaders empower and coach novice church planters and shepherds who start and lead new churches, and who start training other even newer leaders, in turn.

**Myth #8:** “The impulse weakens as it passes from a mother church to daughters, granddaughters, etc....”

**Fact:** Every strong, healthy church alive today is a far descendent of the first church at Jerusalem.

- The presence of Christ and the gifts of the Holy Spirit are communicated by God into every new church, giving it the vitality and life it needs to remain vibrant.
- Some of the main things that weaken the impulse include liberal theology, legalism, dependence on outside resources, and growing too big before reproducing.
- We see reproduction in 2 Timothy 2:2. Paul from Antioch told Timothy in Ephesus to train others, who included Epaphras in Colosse. These trained still others in other places, including Hierapolis and Laodicea (compare Col. 4:12-13). Paul assumed that mentoring would convey the Word to all of these four links in the chain of reproduction. Churches reproduce only as fast as we train new leaders. If mentoring is sustained this way in a pioneer field, there will not be many new churches in which the impulse weakens!

**Myth #9:** “You need a strong *doctrinal* base before a church can be strong enough to reproduce.”

**Fact:** You need a church that lovingly obeys Jesus by making new disciples, to reproduce.

- Reproduction that happens around newly-evangelized families can see churches planted almost as rapidly as evangelism moves from one family, clan, or friendship circle to another. Detailed doctrinal instruction normally comes later.
- Westerners often mean by a “strong doctrinal base” a mental assent to their organization’s dogmas that neither inspire faith nor require loving action. Such ‘doctrinally-strong’ churches seldom reproduce!
- *New* churches need to grow in their understanding of biblical truth, especially the basic truths taught by Jesus. Let them focus on His claims, promises and commandments, supplemented by Bible teaching that emphasizes the main idea of a text along with its immediate application to daily life.

**Myth #10:** You need a strong ‘home base’ first, that is, strong churches, before you can start new churches, extend into new social groups or penetrate new geographical regions.

**Fact:** The longer a congregation waits, the harder it will be to reproduce.

- When reproduction is part of a new churches’ DNA, then its daughter and grand-daughter churches will also set reproduction without delay as a priority.

**Myth #11:** You need a permanent church planting team with good relationships among its members, in order to reproduce churches.

**Fact:** There are no permanent apostolic teams in the Bible, and most new churches are started without formal teams.

- The best church planting ‘teams’ are workers from a nearby church of the same culture.

- . Christ's apostolic band lasted three years. Peter's team that started the Caesarean church included believers from Joppa who did not continue to accompany him. Paul's team continually changed.
- Good church planting teams focus on every church planting project as the primary purpose, not on building up the teams.

**Myth #12:** There are already too many churches.

**Fact:** About a third of the world's population has no church for people of their language and culture, and there is no major society that does not need more churches, or churches that are more relevant to today's generation.

- To discern if more churches are needed, don't count the existing churches. Count the souls who still need to have Jesus presented to them in a meaningful way.
- Although there are churches within most cities where this third of the world's people live, most of these churches cater only to the expatriate community, often in a foreign language, and cannot reproduce indigenously among the common people.
- This huge segment of mankind has little hope of knowing Christ until churches reproduce not only within their country but also within their language and culture group.

**Myth #13:** Church *multiplication* is a fad and a fetish of missionary agencies.

**Fact:** Continually starting new churches is the most effective way to evangelize a society and to make disciples of its population.

- Wherever the apostles of Jesus went, churches multiplied. The same has happened throughout history when workers have made disciples the way Jesus says.
- Most missionary agencies serve already "reached" populations and have use church planting practices that fail to allow churches to reproduce rapidly, in the truly apostolic way.

**Myth #14:** If we start too many churches, then many of them will only die prematurely.

**Fact:** Wherever we start many new churches rapidly, the rate of survival is far higher than where missionaries have, out of caution, kept the pace moving slowly.

- Most churches, even non-reproductive ones, will probably die when they become sterile, failing to reproduce and to practice the ministries that the New Testament requires.
- What a sad tragedy when a church dies before it has reproduced!
- In rapid church planting movements, most churches thrive and start new, healthy churches, in turn. It is part of their God-given, spiritual 'DNA.'

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