



MentorNet #72

A SYSTEM APPROACH TO CHURCH-PLANTING ENDEAVOURS

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This MentorNet article leans to the theoretical side. There is a growing interest amongst church-planting ministries and those who support them, to learn what ‘makes things tick.’ One useful analytical approach to understand organizations and programmes derives from *system theory*. Church-planting ministries can be viewed as a set of sub-systems that interact together, such that, when one sub-system functions poorly, it sends ripple effects through the other sub-systems. Mentors help church planters find weak points in a sub-system and set them right. You can formulate questions to ask about points and issues that these sub-systems imply in their interactions (see page 2). Here are ten such sub-systems. No wonder the task seems daunting!

- 1. Theological Sub-system (thinking God’s thoughts)**
 - a. How do workers adopt biblical promises, priorities and practices?
 - b. How do workers express their Kingdom vision, mission and values?
 - c. In what ways do workers plan by faith to implement their vision, mission and values?
- 2. Spiritual Sub-system (experiencing God’s reality)**
 - a. In what ways do workers practice spirituality, prayer and discernment?
 - b. Describe how workers operate by gifts of the Spirit, in love.
 - c. Site instances of workers overcoming evil and opposition by faith.
- 3. Evangelical Sub-system (proclaiming God’s message)**
 - a. How clearly to workers communicate the original, apostolic Good News?
 - b. How do workers discover and follow family, community and social networks?
 - c. What help to workers require in order to design suitable messages and media?
- 4. Ecclesial Sub-system (reproducing God’s people)**
 - a. What highly-replicable forms, structures and activities have workers introduced?
 - b. In what ways do worshipers experience the Presence of Jesus Christ in their midst?
 - c. Cite examples of worshipers reproducing churches in their social networks?
- 5. Training Sub-system (forming God’s workers)**
 - a. What is the ratio of formal instruction to obedience-oriented mentoring?
 - b. Describe how workers are incorporated into extended training chains.
 - c. With what appropriate materials do mentors supply their apprentice leaders?
- 6. Leadership Sub-system (guiding God’s flocks)**
 - a. Describe how the five-fold ministers operate together in teams.
 - b. What are the steps workers follow to appoint provisional, tested elders and deacons?
 - c. Depend on gifting, growth, motivation and skills.
- 7. Discipleship Sub-system (rearing God’s children)**
 - a. In what ways to workers empower believers to obey Jesus’ commandments?
 - b. What Christian doctrine, values, attitudes and behaviour do workers teach everywhere?
 - c. What personal, family and group disciplines do new churches teach and practice?
- 8. Compassion Sub-system (honouring God’s image)**
 - a. What are the steps that workers take to enable local communities to meet their needs better?
 - b. Cite examples of workers providing temporary relief and sustainable community development.
 - c. What training and resources to workers have for reaching out to social groups at risk?
- 9. Financial Sub-system (supporting God’s work)**
 - a. Describe the ministry’s current worker support structures.
 - b. How do workers empower self-supported leaders and churches for continual expansion?
 - c. Describe current churches’ practices of giving to meet needs and to send evangelists.
- 10. Monitoring and Evaluation Sub-system (tracking God’s blessing)**
 - a. Track and measure selected ‘indicators’ of outcomes from the work.
 - b. Report and compile data from the field that inform leaders who make timely tactical choices.
 - c. Compare outcomes with faith goals, adjust strategies, adopt tactics, and train workers.

**Tentative Sorting Scheme of 100 Systemic Issues that Arise in Reproductive Church Planting
from Ten Inter-acting Sub-systems**

This table is intended to do several things: (a) to demonstrate the complexity of church multiplication work, (b) to suggest facets of the work that may require more prayer or better planning, and (c) to help identify points of weakness, dysfunction and breakdown in church-planting endeavours.

	Theological	Spiritual	Evangelical	Ecclesial	Training	Financial	Leadership	Discipleship	Compassion	Monitoring
Theological	Theological priorities	Sound spirituality	Content of Good News	Who are the church	Doctrinal standards	Theology of finance	Leader roles described	Theology for disciples	Believers' good works	Theology of evaluation
Spiritual	Spiritual outcomes	Priority of experience	Power in evangelism	Spirituality in churches	Experience standards	Cheerfulness in giving	Spirituality of leaders	Spirituality of disciples	Spiritual motives	Motives for monitoring
Evangelical	Salvation theology	Spirituality / evangelism	Outcome expectations	Evangelism in churches	Evangelism training	Financing evangelism	Work of evangelists	Evangelistic witness	Evangelism/ compassion	Evangelistic effectiveness
Ecclesial	Truth for churches	Needs of churches	Evangelism for growth	Churches' self-identity	On-the-job training	account-ability	Local leaders	Disciple-making	Church compassion	CP effectiveness
Training	Training theologians	Training in spirituality	Training evangelists	Training for reproduction	Training trainers	Training in stewardship	Training church elders	How to make disciples	Training deacons	Training progress
Financial	Financing theologians	Self-support in ministry	Imitable methods	Financing mission	Financing training	Financial accounts	Remunerate elders	Disciples' stewardship	Financing compassion	Cost of monitoring
Leadership	Leaders as theologians	Leaders' spirituality	Leaders' evangelism	Leading new churches	Leaders train newer ones	Leader stewardship	Extending 'chains'	Leading for discipleship	Compassion leadership	Managing monitoring
Discipleship	Priority of obedience	Obedience as spiritual life	Obedience in evangelism	Obedience in churches	Obedience in training	Obedience in finances	Obedient leaders	Obeying Jesus' orders	Obedience in compassion	Responsible discipline
Compassion	Compassion in theology	Compassion / spirituality	Compassionate gospel	Church compassion	Training for compassion	Giving for Compassion	Leaders' compassion	Disciples' compassion	Compassion that loves	Priority to meet needs
Monitoring	Tracking studies	Tracking obedience	Gospel progress	Counting churches	Verifying accounts	Counting generations	Counting disciples	Tracking projects	Monitoring reports	Monitor monitoring

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