12

Establishing

Congregating and Maturing

After the initial launch of the church plant, the first believers are growing into faithful disciples of Jesus Christ. During this phase the group will begin to fulfill all the functions of a biblical church, moving beyond initial evangelism and discipleship. Now an awareness of becoming a community, the body of Christ, should be cultivated, nurtured, and lived out. Evangelism and discipleship continue, but the sense of being the people of God, Christ's local church, begins to take shape. The gathered believers are his chosen people, called to the praise of his glory and sent on a collective mission. With this sense of calling and identity the believers become more than a random collection of individual Christians and begin to take on the life of a church.

Biblical Examples

Here we look more to the epistles that describe the life of the churches that Paul planted.

Romans 12:3–8 and 1 Corinthians 12: The exercise of spiritual gifts for edification of the body of Christ

Romans 12:9–10 and 1 Thessalonians 4:1–9: Growth in love and maturity

Ephesians 5:19–20 and Hebrews 10:24–25: Regular meetings for worship and encouragement

Galatians 6:1–2: Mutual correction and bearing of burdens

Key Steps

1. Grow and develop life as the family of God
2. Discover, develop, and employ spiritual gifts for edification of the body of Christ
3. Appoint a preliminary leadership team
4. Meet regularly for corporate worship
5. Multiply cell groups and cell leaders
6. Formulate values and a long-term strategic plan for ministry
7. Teach stewardship

Critical Issues

1. Understanding what it means to be the church
2. Growing in commitment to one another
3. Local believers taking responsibility for ministry

Grow and Develop Life as the Family of God

The fellowship of believers as the family of God is one of the

most wonderful things that a new Christian experiences. But this sense of spiritual family does not always come automatically. Indeed, in contexts where believers face persecution, the response is sometimes suspicion or distrust of others who claim to be believers.

As a part of the discipleship process, church planters must begin teaching explicitly on the nature of the church, using biblical texts such as Acts or Ephesians. Such teaching must also be accompanied by *experiencing* the family of God, the church, in specific ways. In the early church the apostles' teaching, fellowship, breaking of bread, and prayer were central features of common life (Acts 2:42). Members of the Jerusalem church went so far as to sell their possessions to meet one another's material needs (Acts 2:44–45; 4:32–35). Common meals, hospitality, praying for one another, and meeting one another's needs are powerful signs of the work of the Spirit that grow a bond of fellowship. These need to be intentionally modeled and promoted by the church-planting team.

An understanding of the believer's new identity in Christ goes hand in hand with the sense of being the family of God. In many contexts, such as the Muslim world, this is a critical and controversial question. Here again, intentional biblical teaching is imperative. In Christ we are new creatures (2 Cor. 5:17); we are born again by the Spirit and the Word (John 3:3–8; 1 Pet. 1:23; 1 John 5:1); and we become children of God with a common Father in heaven (John 1:12; Gal. 3:26; 1 John 3:1–2). Our identification with Christ as Savior and God as Father trumps all other allegiances and bonds. Our citizenship is in heaven (Phil. 3:20) and is no longer based on nationality, ethnic

background, economic status, gender, caste, education, or any other human feature. "You are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus, for all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. If you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise" (Gal. 3:26–29).

This new identity transcends divisions that have contributed to war, ethnic rivalry, oppression, abuse, and hatred between peoples and individuals. Only by the cross of Christ and the transforming power of the Spirit can the walls of hostility between people be broken down. Nowhere was this more powerful than in the removal of divisions between Jews and Gentiles in the early church (Eph. 2:14–17). A negative example is found in the church of Corinth, where social distinction led to divisions and unfair treatment at, of all places, the celebration of the Lord's Supper. Upper-class Christians likely ate a "private meal" in the smaller dining room of a villa, while the lower classes ate in the larger atrium (or courtyard) with differing menus. Paul would have nothing of such discrimination and distinctions in the church (1 Cor. 11:17–22; cf. Fee 1987, 533–34). A similar situation arose in a caste-based society in Micronesia, where Christians from different castes ate at different tables with different foods at a church picnic. Ethnic and class tensions still plague the church around the globe.

Therefore the churches we plant are truly to be kingdom communities that reflect the lordship of Christ and model reconciled relationships. Our new identity in Christ and a sense

of Christian community must be taught and experienced in the emerging church. Social barriers are deeply rooted and complex. They are overcome only with great patience, bold examples, and persistent teaching.

An additional question often arises in Islamic and similar contexts: should believers call themselves Christians, or are other terms such as *followers of Isa [Jesus]* appropriate?[1] The term *Christian* is often associated with Western culture and its unattractive excesses such as crime, violence, licentiousness, pornography, materialism, disrespectful youth, colonialism, and perceived wars of aggression against Islam. Many feel that avoiding use of the term *Christian* will help avoid such misunderstandings and may prevent new believers from being immediately ostracized from the community they hope to reach. How one answers such questions will depend much on the approach to contextualization that has been adopted. We cannot expand on these questions here, but this example highlights how important it is for the church-planting team to familiarize itself with contextual issues and alternatives so as to respond appropriately to such challenges. The local believers will need to be a part of that discussion and decision-making process.

Discover, Develop, and Employ Spiritual Gifts for Edification of the Body of Christ

The ministries of evangelism and discipleship have been modeled during the previous stage. Now as the group matures, its members must begin to minister to and serve one another in

additional ways. New Christians can easily get the impression that the church planters are there to serve them and that Christianity is mainly a matter of learning the Bible, praying, worshiping, and having their own needs met. But in order to mature in one's walk with Christ, one must follow his example of service, considering the needs of others higher than one's own (Mark 10:45; Phil. 2:3–8). As believers grow in maturity and in a desire to serve, they should also grow in awareness and use of their spiritual gifts. These gifts are for the purpose of building up the body of Christ (1 Cor. 1:7; 1 Pet. 4:10). Thus helping believers to develop their gifts and ministry skills will become an important task for the church planter during this phase. In chapter 17 we will describe in more detail methods of equipping believers for service.

During this phase more public corporate worship services or celebrations may be started and additional cell groups launched. Children's ministry, community service projects, and specialized outreach events may also be initiated. Such ministries will require additional workers, people able to take up the challenge and serve. Because the church at this point of development is usually still rather small, the number of workers will be limited. Enthusiasm may lead the church to want to attempt more than it can handle. The church planter will need to help the church understand its limitations and remain focused on the essential ministries. Ministry should be expanded only as adequate and gifted personnel are available and trained.

How can a person's spiritual gifts be identified? There are numerous questionnaires and surveys available that one can

fill out. Such tools may be a good starting point to identify interests and stimulate discussion, but they have limitations. They are usually not available in many languages and tend to be very specific to churches in Western cultures. Because they are self-reports (i.e., the person assesses his or her own skills and interests), they are not always accurate. We all know the person who thinks that he or she is musical, but isn't! Furthermore, spiritual gift inventories can be frustrating when a person discovers that he or she has a spiritual gift but there doesn't seem to be a corresponding appropriate ministry in which to use it.

The better way to discover gifts is by actually serving. As people experiment with various ministry opportunities, they often discover a joy and fruitfulness that they had not anticipated. Each person's gifts can also be confirmed by others who have observed her or his ministry. Of course even the most gifted persons will need to hone and develop their gifts over time, but usually the potential is evident early in the faith journey. Cell group and ministry team leaders should be taught how to identify giftedness and how to help their group or team members develop and employ those gifts.

Appoint a Preliminary Leadership Team

As long as the church is very small and consists of just a few families, decision making and planning will be largely informal, with broad consensus and input from the group. But as the church grows, so too grows the need for a smaller leadership team. Initially this might be a planning committee composed of one representative from each family. However, once this group grows beyond about ten persons, effective planning again becomes difficult and a smaller decision-making group should be appointed.

The purpose and manner by which these initial leaders are appointed is critical. In some situations the church planter may hand-pick the leaders, who are appointed for a limited term of leadership. For example, if several cell groups exist, the cell group leaders might form the preliminary leadership team. In most situations, however, a more participative approach such as an election is recommended. Whatever approach is taken, several principles should be observed:

- All committed participants in the emerging church should have some say in the process of determining the leaders. Whether through a formal election process or informal discussions, their opinions must be sought and respected. It is essential even at this stage that leaders have the trust and confidence of those they are leading. Unfortunately cross-cultural church planters often choose leaders who appeal to their cultural

standards and personality but who lack the respect of the local people within the culture. This must obviously be avoided.

- This leadership team should be clearly a provisional, temporary appointment. The reason for this is that in the early months of a church plant there are often too few mature believers qualified for the office of elder. Yet a decision-making team is needed. At a later time during the structuring phase mature believers who are better qualified for formal church leadership will emerge, and at that time a more formal calling of church elders can occur. Not all the provisional leaders will be among them. Thus at this point it is wise to avoid formal titles such as *elder* and thus preclude false expectations and any compromise of the biblical qualifications for leaders. Terms such as "provisional leadership team," "planning team," or "steering committee" will make clear the temporary nature of the decision-making group.

- The role of this preliminary leadership team should be clearly spelled out as primarily planning, prayer, and organizational leadership. The spiritual oversight carried out by elders is not yet primarily in view. This temporary team will serve in some ways as a testing ground for the spiritual qualification and leadership abilities of those who might later be appointed to long-term leadership roles.

One of the key roles that must be fulfilled at this stage is treasurer. During this phase of the church plant, expenses will be incurred and financial collections from the congregation will become necessary. The congregation must take primary responsibility for the financial needs of the ministry, and thus one of its own should be responsible for the collecting, accounting, and administration of funds. To foster accountability, two persons should normally count the offerings and sign checks. It is generally unwise for the church planters to occupy this position. For obvious reasons this is a sensitive responsibility requiring the highest integrity, trust from the congregation, spiritual maturity, and basic accounting skills. Unfortunately many churches have experienced great heartache and setbacks because of appointing the wrong person to this office. The temptations are many, as one not only has access to financial resources (often in a context of poverty) but often also has knowledge of the personal giving patterns of members. A culturally appropriate form of financial accounting and accountability should be instituted early on. A high level of accountability is not a sign of mistrust but rather is wise protection for the treasurer and the congregation alike.

Meet Regularly for Corporate Worship

Regular gathering for teaching, singing, mutual encouragement, reading of Scripture, celebration of the Lord's Supper, and collection of offerings is a natural expression of being the people of God. This is what we mean when we speak of corporate worship. In the establishing phase these activities become a regular part of the emerging church's corporate life.

When such worship occurs primarily in homes or small groups, we can speak of a house church movement. However, in most settings the cell groups or house churches will want to gather together for larger combined meetings of celebration, even if irregularly. We have a hint of this in the church of Corinth: as in most of the early churches, the Corinthian believers gathered in several homes as house churches, but "the whole church" also came together for worship in one place, presumably in one larger home (1 Cor. 14:23; cf. 1 Cor. 11:20; Rom. 16:23; Gehring 2004, 139, 142).[2]

Some churches will either by choice or by compulsion[3] remain house church movements with only informal worship times in private homes. Most churches will, however, choose to eventually begin more public worship services. In many contexts public services are a good venue for inviting unbelievers, to evangelize them and introduce them to the Christian community. In some cultures the notion of entering a stranger's home under any circumstances is uncomfortable; thus to attend a church meeting in a private home would be considered bizarre, and the church might be viewed as a dangerous religious sect. More formal public worship services

can give the church greater credibility and may be more inviting for outsiders. Public worship services can be advertised and are more accessible to those who have no personal contact with church members. In such contexts a decision may need to be made as to whether such corporate worship is conducted primarily with the needs of believers in view or more evangelistically or "seeker sensitive" so that unbelievers who attend can understand and relate to what is happening. In the New Testament church we see that both concerns, edification of believers (e.g., Eph. 5:19–20) and sensitivity to impressions on unbelievers (e.g., 1 Cor. 14:22–25), were to be kept in view.

The timing and preparations for the launch of regular corporate worship must be considered carefully and prayerfully. Because North American church planting often places great emphasis on the launching of public worship services, numerous resources are available to plan the event. We only summarize here a few key factors to consider as public worship is begun.

When to Start Public Worship

Starting too soon can make people feel that the church is too small, and workers can become overwhelmed with all the energy that must be invested in preparing and leading worship services. Advocates of launching large, with fifty to a hundred or more persons in the launch team, believe that this is important to be attractive to potential visitors and provide a quality worship experience (e.g., Gray 2007, 107–17). This approach involves gaining high public visibility, drawing a large "crowd," and then building a "congregation" and "core" from the crowd—working from a large group to form small ones (e.g., Sylvia 2006). In many settings launching large is not an option, however, because there simply aren't that many believers. This is one reason that we have advocated beginning at the small group level of disciplemaking, building the launch team through evangelism and discipleship, and then moving outward to more public worship. On the other hand, waiting too long to start public worship can sometimes lead to loss of motivation, stagnation, or departures from the emerging church in favor of an already established one. Usually the best time to start public worship is when the local believers sense a need to do so. However, the church planter may need to temper the enthusiasm of the group and carefully think through all the conditions for the start.

Some cell church advocates suggest that public worship services not begin until at least three healthy cell groups have been formed. The reason for this is that with commencement of weekly Sunday public worship, energy tends to shift to the worship service and away from the cell groups. The life of the

cell groups can suffer as a result. Furthermore, if only one or two cell groups exist and one dissolves, then the cell life of the church will be overshadowed.

Particularly when planting a cell-based church, one should consider beginning with quarterly or monthly worship services. With time and as the group's numbers, resources, and abilities grow, the church can offer more frequent services. This has several advantages. First, the primary emphasis of church life remains at the cellular level. Church at the cell level is no less "church" than public worship services are church. Second, the strain on finances, energy, and talent is less if public worship is offered less often. Preparing music, sermons, decoration, a children's program, and so on demands a considerable investment of time and money that can be a great burden on a small church with mostly new believers. Third, a neutral meeting place can be rented on an hourly basis. It is much easier to find and finance a meeting place for quarterly or monthly services than for weekly services. Fourth, even though weekly services are not yet offered, periodic congregational meetings give believers a sense of anticipation and help them assess their ability to conduct weekly services.

For churches that intend to use the worship service as a high-visibility opportunity for evangelism, an attractive program for visitors, it is often recommended to begin with "preview" services. These are occasional services that are offered once or several times prior to the commencement of weekly services. They create a sense of anticipation in both the launch team and the community, and also give the church the opportunity to "practice" worship in a new location, develop

skills, and work out logistical issues. Preview services can also be a way to build the core group of the church prior to launching weekly worship services.

Where to Start Public Worship

Determining and finding an appropriate meeting place for public worship is one of the greatest challenges faced at this phase. Especially in urban areas, real estate and rents are expensive. The location, space, and atmosphere of the locale will be of critical importance. When a church plant is first launching public worship, it is normally recommended to rent a meeting space on an hourly basis and avoid long-term rental agreements or purchase of property. A small church plant does not normally have the finances for expensive rents or mortgages, and it would be unwise for an outside agency to provide such funds. To grow commitment and avoid unhealthy dependencies, the offerings of the congregation should cover such ongoing expenses. Renting on an hourly basis allows maximum flexibility at minimum expense. Should the church outgrow the meeting place, or should the location turn out to be disadvantageous, another can be sought and the church is not contractually bound. Owning property may be advantageous later, but many a church has purchased property early along only to regret it when it has proved unsuitable but difficult to sell or enlarge.

Case Study 12.1

Meeting for Worship in the Gramin Pachin Mandal Church

Paul Pierson describes the contextualized worship of the rapidly growing Gramin Pachin Mandal Church among the Dalits of India.

"The people engage in corporate worship once a week. This can be on any day, since the pastors each cover twelve village congregations, leading worship twice a day. No congregation can be larger than forty families. When they arrive the pastors visit the believers house to house, inviting them to worship. They also do pastoral work and receive offerings at that time. Then the people come together and draw a circle, or mandal. The sanctuary, or worship center can be created in a few minutes. It is built around the Hindu concept of a shrine where God is honored and respected. Even though it is a temporary place set up with a rug thrown on the ground it is considered holy ground and no one stands on it without taking off his or her shoes. This reminds the people of Moses who took off his shoes in the presence of God" (Pierson 2004, 41).

Various symbols are used as didactic aids. Because 95 percent of the members are illiterate, various prayers are memorized. Pastors teach from a fixed curriculum that covers the entire Bible, articles of faith, and the Apostles' Creed. Many of the hymns are Bible texts put to music. Plays have been written that dramatize the Gospels.

There are many creative options when a church is seeking temporary or longer-term meeting places for worship. Typical venues include schools, conference rooms, hotels, community centers, museum or library lecture rooms, restaurants, the cafeteria of a factory or office, or even a pub! Some churches use open public spaces such as parks (see case study 12.1, the Gramin Pachin Mandal Church).

In addition to looking at issues of affordability, when the emerging church is considering the location of a meeting place its leaders should ask the following questions:[4]

- Is there adequate space for the number of persons

anticipated, and are there rooms available for children's ministry? Will there be adequate heating, ventilation, sanitary facilities? Will there be the possibility of cooking or meals at the location?

- Are the rooms inviting, attractive, and comfortable to the ministry focus people? Are they too elegant (perhaps uncomfortable for working-class or poor people)? Are they too simple (perhaps unattractive to members of upper classes)?
- Are utilities, furnishings, sound system, and other necessities provided, or must they be purchased and stored?
- Will renovations or structural changes be necessary? If so, how will they be done or paid for?
- Is the location easily accessible via public transportation, or where people own vehicles, is there adequate parking?
- Will usage permits be necessary, or is the venue already legally available for public meetings with the number of anticipated persons? Will neighbors be disturbed by singing, preaching, and traffic on Sunday mornings when they wish they could sleep?
- How important is high or low visibility? In some contexts high visibility can be a good means of advertising, but in other contexts a very public site may attract undue attention and opposition in the community.
- Is the environment potentially disturbing or distracting? Noise from traffic, railroads, or a

neighboring factory or disco may make meetings impossible at certain times of day. One church rented space next to an apartment whose residents' television, stereo, flushing toilet, and other sounds were clearly discernible through the wall in the worship room!

- Is the location perceived as safe? High-crime neighborhoods, red-light districts, proximity to a cemetery or slum, and other factors may make the location unattractive. In one case, to enter the church rooms visitors had to pass by a yard where they were greeted by a large, frightening, barking German shepherd.

Clearly the focus people must be constantly kept in mind when these questions are being considered. A meeting place that is suitable for one group may be unacceptable to another. Again, local believers will be the best resource to answer such questions. The cross-cultural worker might miss many subtle nuances that are glaring obstacles to the local people.

Preparing for Public Worship

Beginning public worship usually involves formidable planning and preparation. Much will of course depend on what kinds of ministries will be featured as part of the worship experience. Even very informal worship requires careful preparation. Poorly prepared worship can communicate lack of reverence, give negative impressions, and create unnecessary frustration and stress. In many contexts there is an expectation of high quality and professionalism that should be reflected in the worship experience. The leadership team will need to clarify whether the worship service is to be primarily structured to meet the needs of believers or whether it is also to be attractive and speak to the needs of unbelievers who may attend as visitors. All these matters must be prayerfully taken into account in the planning process.

Typically the following specific matters must be organized: a meeting place must be found; materials such as chairs, pulpit, projector or songbooks, and children's and nursery furniture secured; advertising, publicity, and signage undertaken. Perhaps most importantly, workers must be prepared. These will typically include preachers, worship leaders, and musicians, children's and nursery workers, ushers and greeters, technical workers, and setup and teardown teams. Numerous workbooks, checklists, and literature are available for church planters in Western contexts.[5] Whatever approach one takes, the primary source of materials and finances should be the local believers, using local resources that are contextually appropriate and can be locally replicated when the church is ready to reproduce.

Contextualizing Worship

Few aspects of church life are so affected by culture, for good or for ill, as is worship. Language, music, dress, posture and body language, art and architecture, symbols and rituals, punctuality and length of service, preaching style, level of spontaneity and formality—there is hardly an element of worship that is not somehow culturally conditioned. Cross-cultural church planters must make extra effort to avoid inadvertently introducing unnecessarily foreign, uncomfortable, or even offensive cultural elements into worship. How worship forms can be an obstacle to the gospel is illustrated by this example from a letter written to J. Dudley Woodberry from a West African country (certain terms have been excised to protect local believers):

> Their customs are too different from ours. They keep their shoes on, sit on benches (and close to women at that), and they beat drums in church. We are used to worshipping God by taking our shoes off, sitting and kneeling on mats, and chanting prayers in the Arabic and _____ languages. Also we teach our women at home. If we go to the _____ church, we feel very uncomfortable. What's more, our Muslim friends will not join us. If we worship God the way we are used to, other Muslims will be interested. But we will pray in the name of Jesus and teach from the Arabic and _____ Bibles. (Woodberry 1989, 283)

In this context, removing shoes and kneeling on mats is not contrary to biblical teaching (recall Moses) and could be adopted as forms that demonstrate greater reverence. The seating custom could also be adapted to respect cultural norms of propriety so that especially women could feel at ease attending worship. Basic elements of worship can be easily misunderstood, as Darrell Whiteman describes in Melanesia: "Although villagers may not understand the content of the

Prayer Book, Bible and Hymn Book, they nevertheless consider them to have *mana* and to be *tabu*. In many villages these are used only in the chapel and left there with the other 'holy paraphernalia' when people leave the chapel and return to their houses" (1983, 379). The Aziana of the Philippines confused celebration of the Lord's Supper with their ceremonial worship of the sun, whereby an animal was sacrificed and its blood and liver were consumed as a ritual of forgiveness (McIlwain 1987, 49).

Biblical contextualization faces the challenge of how to fulfill biblical purposes and values that are in many ways countercultural while at the same time employing culturally appropriate forms and expressions.[6] As the Lutheran World Federation statement on worship and culture notes, "The task of relating worship and culture is ultimately concerned with finding the balance between relevance and authenticity, between particularity and universality, while avoiding eclecticism and/or syncretism" (quoted in Stauffer 1996, 183). The early church adopted many elements of worship from the Jewish synagogue, but it remained subject to the creative leading of the Spirit and adapted to each local situation (cf. Longenecker 2002, 81–86).

In deciding such matters it is essential that local believers have the primary voice. As cultural insiders they are in the best position to discern the meanings of various practices and expressions. They may naturally look to a missionary or other churches for guidance, but walking (with the church planter's help) through the process of discerning biblical purposes and values and how their cultural norms and practices will advance

or hinder them is a valuable learning experience that will serve them well long after the church planter has departed. We can comment briefly on just a few cultural factors that must be considered in public worship.

Language. Language is not merely a neutral means of communication but is closely tied to ethnic identity. If various dialects are spoken in a region, a national language or common trade language may be used so as to avoid giving preference to one ethnicity. However, this may exclude women or children who are not fluent in that language. If a Bible translation is not available in the local vernacular, another version must be used and translated. Many languages have different grammatical forms for formal or informal address. Worship leaders and speakers must determine the appropriate level of familiarity.

Music. Whenever possible, indigenous musical styles and instruments should be adopted. However some styles, rhythms, or instruments may be closely associated with non-Christian worship or meanings (such as sensuality or drug usage). Those meanings may be lost to later generations of believers, but for the first generation they can awaken inappropriate responses (cf. Kraft 2005, 255–73). In many parts of the world believers want to adopt Western hymns or contemporary Western praise music. If such music speaks to their hearts and lyrics are translated, it is surely appropriate. However, more indigenous forms of music should also be explored and encouraged, and they can sometimes be blended with more modern musical styles. Ethnomusicology, a growing field of study devoted to the cultural and social aspects of indigenous music, has exciting applications for

contextualization of Christian worship. Contextualized Christian music is important for proclamation, evangelism, theology, teaching, confession, and more (cf. King 2005; Neeley 1999).

Body language. Is respect demonstrated by standing, and humility by kneeling or prostrating? Is prayer expressed by folding hands, raising them, or washing them? The meanings of these expressions are not universal. In many cultures dance is an especially rich form of bodily expression and worship, often overlooked by Western missionaries. In the words of Ghanaian John Pobee, sacred dance should be a part of prayer because "Western-influenced prayer is very much an exercise of the mind, while the African . . . has to pray much more with his whole body" (1981, 49). Clothing also communicates in culturally specific ways: formal or informal, amount of exposed skin, head covering, wearing or removing shoes, and so on. The church of Corinth was exhorted to give attention to the cultural propriety of women's dress (1 Cor. 11:5–16).

Time. Ten or eleven o'clock on Sunday morning as a time for worship is not sacred; it was originally chosen as the time after which farmers had milked their cows! Another time might be more appropriate in a different setting. Cultures also have different understandings of punctuality. Regardless of stated time, in many places events begin only after everyone has arrived. The length of the sermon and of the service is also culturally conditioned. In some cultures services must end in time for wives of non-Christians to return home and promptly serve the family noon meal. In other cultures spending the entire day together, including meals, is entirely appropriate.

Art and furniture arrangement. Elements such as seating

arrangement (as in the letter Woodberry quoted), decoration and art, a sense of what is an appropriate level of crowdedness or appropriate personal space, quality of furnishings, and meanings of various colors all vary greatly between cultures and are significant factors in what people perceive as appropriate, comfortable, or aesthetically pleasing. Yet their significance is easily overlooked by cross-cultural church planters. Even plants can have symbolic significance (Felde 1998, 46). Drama is familiar in most cultures and can provide a powerful means of communication to be explored in worship.

Symbols and rituals. Mathias Zahniser has argued in *Symbol and Ceremony: Making Disciples across Cultures* (1997) that Western evangelical missionaries have tended to view worship very rationally and underestimate the importance of visual and symbolic expressions in worship. Yet ceremonies and visual symbols are very powerful communicative tools in most cultures, and neglecting them can leave a sense of emptiness in worshipers. Often local customs such as harvest festivals (thanksgiving), marriage customs, and ritual washings can be easily adapted for Christian worship. For example, the famous early morning prayer meetings of Korean Christians, *sae byuk kido*, were adapted from pre-Christian Korean religious practice (Brown 1994). However, such practices can have non-Christian meanings that must be carefully discerned. Paul Hiebert's (1987) four-step process of critical contextualization can be used to contextualize such practices: (1) cultural exegesis of the custom from an insider perspective to discern meanings, (2) biblical exegesis of relevant Bible teachings, (3) critical evaluation of the custom in light of

biblical teaching, and (4) creation of a contextualized practice. Some practices will be rejected outright, others will be adopted with little change, but most will require either significant change or the substitution of a new practice to convey Christian meanings and avoid false associations.

Multiply Cell Groups and Cell Leaders

As the church grows, new cell groups will be formed or existing cells will multiply. This presents the need to continually raise up new cell group leaders. This should be done with intentionality. Even if the cells grow numerically, they will not reproduce unless new cell leaders are equipped. After potential new cell leaders are selected, they might receive a basic orientation or initial training, serve as apprentice under an experienced cell leader, and attend a monthly or regular cell leader meeting. Steve Cordelle (2005, 91–93) describes training methods such as the encounter retreat, school of discipleship, and coaching group. Our discussion focuses on initial training, apprenticeship-mentoring, and cell leader meeting.

Identifying Potential Apprentice Cell Leaders

Finding and recruiting apprentice leaders is one of the greatest challenges to cell group multiplication. Several steps can be taken to enlist apprentice leaders. First, don't set the standard too high. On the one hand, participation in leader training and being a positive example are essential and nonnegotiable. On the other hand, every believer is a work in progress, and the perfect leader has yet to be born. If the church is growing rapidly by conversion, most potential leaders will be new believers. This only underscores the next point: provide adequate, practical equipping through mentoring and the leader meeting. If potential leaders understand that they won't be left ill equipped and alone at the task, they will be more likely to volunteer and step out in faith.

Important qualities of potential cell leaders include spiritual maturity, faithfulness, adequate Bible knowledge so as to correct false teaching, ability to inspire confidence in cell members, and some basic interpersonal skills in leading a group. Because cell groups, as the church's basic building blocks, are the primary locus of fellowship, discipleship, spiritual care, and evangelism in the life of the church, a cell group leader should have the goal of exhibiting qualities similar to those of a church elder (1 Tim. 3:1–6; Titus 1:5–9). Indeed gifted and effective cell leaders are often the best candidates for the office of elder. However, a growing church is often largely composed of new believers who are still in the early stages of the character development as Christians and will need to grow into the role under the guidance of a more mature believer.

Initial Training of Cell Leaders

Cell leaders learn mostly from the example of mentors and the practice they receive as apprentices. However, there are three good reasons to launch their training with a training event or retreat. First of all, cell leaders must understand and believe in the core values of a cell church. At the initial training they will also learn the responsibilities of a cell leader, commit to this ministry, and design a growth plan (character and skills) that will help in the mentoring process. An added benefit is that new cell leaders form a bond that will motivate them to work together, help each other, and pray for each other. This helps to launch or strengthen the leadership community.

This initial training might be offered annually in a growing cell church and can take the form of an intensive weekend retreat, a series of four to six workshops, or a combination of the two. At the close of the training the core commitments of a cell group leader should be explained and trainees can pray for each other (see sidebar 12.1).

Mentoring Apprentice Cell Leaders

The most basic approach to equipping new leaders of any kind is personal mentoring or coaching. The concept is simple: an experienced leader identifies a person who has demonstrated potential to be a future cell leader and invites that person to become an apprentice. Often that person will already be a member of the leader's group. As Cordelle reminds us, "The process of leadership development starts with the relational discipleship of a cell group" (2005, 89). One does not begin by making a leader; one begins by making a disciple, which is one of the primary functions of a cell. The leader models effective cell leadership and meets regularly with the apprentice to discuss the nature of leading the group and issues that have arisen, and to pray together. The apprentice is given opportunity to be a coleader of the group or leads the group in the absence of the leader. The leader gives the apprentice constructive feedback about his or her leadership. Over time, the ability of the apprentice to lead and serve the group can be assessed. The trust level of the group members and their response to the apprentice are important indicators of the apprentice's readiness to lead her or his own group. We shall discuss mentoring and coaching in greater detail later in chapter 17.

Sidebar 12.1

Commitments of Cell Group Leaders

The basic commitments of cell group leaders need to be presented clearly during the training and reviewed periodically. Consider the following eight key commitments to be a fruitful cell group leader:

1. *Pray.* I commit myself to seek God for my life and my cell group daily and to intercede regularly for my cell group's members.
2. *Prepare.* I will prepare my mind and heart for the cell meeting, and I will involve my cell intern(s) in the preparation.
3. *Develop.* I will invest in cell apprentices and rising leaders, encourage them, give them ministry opportunities, and debrief them on their contributions.
4. *Win.* I will build relationships with nonbelievers, serve them, and share Jesus through word and deed. I will also encourage others to do this.
5. *Serve.* I will serve others with my gifts, my knowledge, my energy, my time, my possessions. I will visit and telephone others as God leads me.
6. *Lead.* I will lead the meetings so that the focus is on Jesus, mutual edification is the norm, and newcomers feel welcome.
7. *Edify.* I will encourage cell members to grow in their relationship with God and in service to the church and community.
8. *Stimulate.* With God's help I will lead the cell in outreach and service efforts according to the leading of the Holy Spirit (Wilson 1998, 230).

The Cell Group Leader Meeting

One of the most effective ways to equip apprentice cell leaders and provide ongoing equipping for cell group leaders is holding a regular leader meeting.[7] At least monthly the leaders and apprentices meet for approximately two hours for prayer, vision casting, organization, and teaching. The teaching segment should explore practical skills necessary to lead a cell group and take up issues that the groups are currently facing. Topics might include the following:

- methods of Bible study and interpretation
- formulating discussion questions and leading a Bible discussion
- visitation of sick or otherwise needy cell group members
- evangelism in the cell group
- prayer in the cell group
- conflict resolution
- dealing with dominant or difficult personalities
- balancing the personal life of the cell group leader
- stimulating the spiritual growth of cell group members
- helping cell group members identify and use their spiritual gifts
- assessing the quality and health of one's cell group
- reproducing and forming a new cell group

Apprentices attending the leader meeting will not only receive instruction but come to better understand what is entailed in cell group leadership.

Multiplying Cells

As a cell group grows and an apprentice matures to the point of being able to lead a new group, the time for reproducing a new cell is near. However, birthing a new group out of an existing one is not always easy. In a healthy cell group, friendships have grown and trust has been established. Understandably members will want to remain together and not divide to begin two groups. This is a universal challenge faced even in China, where house churches are multiplying at an unprecedented rate. This challenge can be overcome by emphasizing that first and foremost the ultimate goal is not that members of the cell be comfortable and happy together; the foremost goal is making disciples—more disciples and better disciples. This will entail growth through evangelism to the point that the group will eventually become too large to retain the intimacy and accountability necessary for discipleship.

Often it is better for a cell group not to divide half and half (half the group members departing to form a new group, the other half remaining) but rather to send or commission three or four group members as a missional team to establish a new group. The advantage is that the relationships of the existing group are not as severely severed and the new group has a greater missional-evangelistic thrust. Because the new group is smaller, its task will be more clearly evangelistic, and members will be more motivated to recruit, disciple, and integrate new persons into the group.

Formulate Values and a Long-Term Strategic Plan for

Ministry

As the church begins to grow and expand ministries, determining the core values of the church, formulating a vision statement, and defining the church's distinctives and a long-term strategic plan will become important. Early in the preparing phase an initial strategy will have been formulated. But as the church plant progresses, that strategy will need to be refined and adapted to the realities experienced in the launching of the church plant. At this point local believers must have a voice in that process, to ensure that they own the vision, provide an insider perspective, understand the strategy, and are committed to its execution. The same can be said regarding the core values of the church. To facilitate this process, it can be helpful to lead a series of Bible studies on evangelism, mission, and the church. Often a retreat setting is ideal to bring the core group together for a time of concerted and undistracted prayer and planning to discern the course that the church should take.

A strategic ministry plan should address points such as these:

- effective and affordable evangelistic methods for reaching the focus people
- methods of discipleship and assimilation of new persons into the fellowship
- how to equip and mobilize workers for various ministries
- church structures such as cell/celebration or house

church, leadership structures, and children's ministries
- style of worship
- a philosophy of cell multiplication
- potential locations for daughter churches or pioneer church plants

Several large North American churches have well-known strategic ministry plans:

- Willow Creek Community Church's seven-step philosophy: relationship, verbal witness, weekend service, New Community, small group, service involvement, and stewardship
- Saddleback Church's purpose-driven "CLASS Strategy": leading people from community to congregation to commitment to core through a series of seminars
- Community Christian Church in Naperville's "Followership": celebrate, connect, contribute

These ministry plans are well thought out, delineating a process of leading people to faith and moving them to greater levels of commitment and service. Specific programs, services, events, and benchmarks are usually spelled out and very intentionally designed to promote the growth process, as in a

well-conceived business plan. Often diagrams help communicate the process. Most such plans are easy for the average congregant to grasp, seeing where he or she is in the process and how to contribute to help others grow. Those seeking guidance in the strategic planning process should consult works such as Aubrey Malphurs's *Advanced Strategic Planning: A New Model for Church and Ministry Leaders* (2005). But the process at this point needn't be overly complicated.

Such refined ministry plans may seem unnecessary for house churches or simple church structures. But every church should be clear about how it carries out the disciplemaking process in its context—be it a simple one-on-one approach or a highly programmed, professional approach. Table 12.1, "The Disciplemaking Church," lays out a strategic ministry planning aid that has been used in several church plants in Germany. Based on Matthew 28:19–20, the leadership team or core group can consider the various steps of conversion, discipleship, service, and spiritual growth, and the values inherent in each step. The first steps have as a primary goal leading people to know Christ; the following steps seek to help them glorify Christ as they live for him and become involved in spiritual growth and service. Then they ask what activities or programs can contribute to leading people to the next level of becoming a devoted follower of Jesus Christ. A church may be tempted to adopt a variety of programs or activities that leaders have observed in other churches. But the team should adopt only those ministries and activities that will contribute to the overall purposes of the church, in particular the making of disciples.

At this point in the church's development, many of the elements of such a strategic plan may not yet be realized. But it is important to have the big picture of the goal and how over the course of time that goal is to be attained. In the process of carrying out the plan there will be unexpected developments and changes will be necessary; thus plans must be held with an open hand and remain flexible.

Pitfalls during the Establishing Phase

There are several dangers to which planters should be alert during this phase. In a sense the DNA of the church is being set: habits established, patterns formed, and models of ministry launched that will become determinative for the future development of the church and increasingly difficult to change later.

Table 12.1

The Disciplemaking Church

The Command	The Method	The Step	The Target	The Key Idea	The Goal	The Values	The Activities
Make disciples of all nations	Go . . .	Build relationships	Indifferent	Love	Knowing God	Relevance, relationships, meeting needs, trust, seeking the lost, credibility, service, "a Greek to the Greeks"	
		Communicate the gospel	Interested	Evangelism		Biblical proclamation, finding the lost, every Christian a witness	
	Baptizing them . . .	Lead to repentance and faith in Christ	Seekers			Necessity of a personal decision	
	Teaching them to obey everything that I commanded you	Follow up in faith and obedience	New believers	Discipleship	Glorifying God	Following Christ, practical faith and obedience, truth, personal renewal, Christian disciplines	
		Enfold into the church	Disciples	Fellowship		Commitment, faithfulness, unity, spiritual family	
		Train to serve	Members	Service		Spiritual gifts, responsibility, servanthood, stewardship of time, talent, and resources	
		Promote further spiritual growth	Servants	Edification		Sanctification, increasingly honoring God, Christlikeness	

Failure to Exercise Church Discipline

Exercising church discipline is never a happy task, but church planters can be particularly tempted to avoid it because the nascent church is small and the loss of even one individual can seemingly set back progress. But discipline will often be necessary if the health of the church is to be maintained. Of course new believers (as well as old) come into the church with an array of sinful attitudes, behaviors, and habits that won't be resolved overnight. One will need much wisdom in determining when discipline is called for. But those who after counsel and exhortation stubbornly persist in behavior dishonoring to God, discrediting to the church, and harmful to themselves and others will eventually need to be disciplined.

In the words of Ken Baker, "The entire realm of church discipline is generally a mine-strewn land where trespassers must beware" (2005, 339). This is especially so in cross-cultural ministry situations where the church planter is unfamiliar with the subtleties of cultural norms, values of honor and shame, and local strategies for conflict resolution. In collectivistic cultures, disciplining one member can result in the loss of entire extended families. Nevertheless, compromise here can have devastating consequences. Before situations of apparent entrenched sin arise, planters will need to study relevant biblical texts[8] with the local leaders and settle on a course of disciplinary action that is appropriate to the culture while maintaining biblical norms and goals. First Thessalonians 5:14 is perhaps the best summary: "We urge you, brothers, warn those who are idle, encourage the timid, help the weak, be patient with everyone."

Church Planters Adopting a Pastoral Rather Than Empowering Role

As the fellowship of believers takes on the life of a congregation, there will be a temptation for the church planters to move into a pastoral and nurturing role. There are many new believers with many personal needs. One must rightly be concerned with the continued growth and maturity of these believers, who will become core of the church, and some its leaders. Further, as many new ministries are launched, church planters will be tempted to provide all the preaching, teaching, and organizational leadership. Especially if the church-planting team is composed of theologically trained and experienced workers, new believers will naturally look to them to staff the various ministries.

But if the apostolic model is being adopted, rather than believers looking to the church planters for teaching, administration, and nurture, the focus must be more on the equipping of local believers to meet those needs. Here is where the critical shift in church planter role from motor and model to *mobilizer* and *mentor* must take place. Gradually the church planters are less and less the doers of frontline ministry and increasingly the equippers behind the scenes, empowering local believers to be those doers. Ministry skills still need to be modeled, especially new skills needed for new ministries, but the planters should no longer be the primary motor of those ministries.

Loss of Evangelistic Thrust

An additional danger is a loss of evangelistic momentum as more energy is invested in bringing to maturity the believers already present. It is natural for a church to go through a period of evangelistic harvest followed by a period of slower growth during which new believers are discipled. But if the young congregation remains permanently in a maturing mode, growth will stagnate, and the congregation will begin to perceive itself not as a church on a mission but as an institution that exists to meet the needs of its members. This is one reason that after initial growth many church plants plateau with only a few dozen members.

Loss of Focus and Overcommitment

There is a temptation for the young emerging church to take on too many ministries and become overwhelmed. The expansion of ministries in new directions occurs more in the next phase of structuring. During this phase, as the church is only emerging, energies must be focused on those ministries that are essential. This is not to suggest that no works of compassion are initiated, but they must be reasonable and limited in scope so as not to diffuse the energies of the emerging church in too many different directions.

Unwise Use of Outside Resources

As we have argued throughout this book, a key to long-term church multiplication is the ability to plant churches using locally available resources and locally sustainable structures. When the church comes to the point of offering regular public worship services, there is often a great need for materials such as projectors, furniture, and room renovations, and need to increase the budget to cover ongoing expenses such as rent, utilities, printing, advertising, and children's curriculum. While outside resources may to a limited extent assist, the primary provision for ministry must originate with the local believers. In most cases this will be a test of faith. But church members have opportunity to demonstrate commitment to the effort, create ownership, exercise faith, and set a pattern of locally driven church planting that is not dependent on outside resources. In chapter 18 we will offer detailed guidelines for the wise use of outside resources in church planting. The current phase, however, is perhaps the most critical time to build the church ministry on the basis of *local* resources, because this is probably the first time that significant financial and other resources become critical to the advancement of the church plant.

During the establishing phase many exciting developments take place: the new community takes on its unique character and mission, local leaders emerge, the body of believers identifies more clearly with the culture, and the shift from external to insider direction takes a major leap forward. Members of the apostolic church-planting team will rejoice as they empower and release disciples and workers, remembering

that this is why they were sent.