



## Strategy of Cell Group Multiplication in Church Planting Based on the Great Commission

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### ABSTRACT

Church planting in modern society faces serious challenges such as missionary growth stagnation and the tendency toward worship services and leadership figures that are centralized. This study aims to describe the theological basis of cell group multiplication based on the Great Commission and to analyze its implementation strategies in church planting. The research method used is qualitative with a library research approach, collecting and analyzing theological literature, scientific journals, and biblical studies systematically. The results show that the Great Commission in Matthew 28:19-20 gives a mandate for discipleship that is reproductive, while the pattern of the early church in Acts 2:42-47 demonstrates the effectiveness of house communities as a basis for growth and church planting. Effective cell group multiplication strategies include relational evangelism, reproductive discipleship, leadership multiplication, and the formation of new congregations.

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## INTRODUCTION

The Great Commission of Jesus Christ in Matthew 28:19-20 is an undeniable theological foundation for all missionary activities and church development throughout the ages. The mandate to "make disciples of all nations" emphasizes not only the aspect of evangelism in the sense of bringing people to faith, but also includes a continuous and reproductive discipleship process. Coleman (2020) in *The Master Plan of Discipleship* affirms that the discipleship Jesus exemplified during His three and a half years of ministry was a relational model that emphasized the reproduction of faith through shared life, not merely the transfer of theological knowledge. However, the reality of contemporary church ministry shows that many churches are experiencing alarming missionary growth stagnation. Church planting is often centered on large worship services and specific leadership figures, while cell groups are frequently understood merely as internal pastoral programs, not as a strategic foundation for the broader mission of the church.

This stagnation phenomenon is not a new issue in the discourse of practical theology. Research conducted by Barasa (2024) at St. Peter's Cathedral Tororo, Uganda, revealed that factors such as members' inability to balance cell groups with work, limited appreciation of cell groups as the core unit connecting families with the church, and a lack of training and mentoring for cell group leaders are the main causes of declining effectiveness of cell group-based ministry. These findings indicate that the problems faced by churches in various parts of the world share similar patterns, thus requiring comprehensive and structured theological solutions.

Previous research has mostly discussed cell group growth from the perspective of church organizational management or general discipleship without explicitly linking it to church planting. For example, research by Kurniadhi (2025) on the effectiveness of small groups in the Baptist Churches of Indonesia concluded that the implementation of small groups has not been fully effective in producing church growth in both quality and quantity

due to the weak system of sustainable leadership development. Another study by Parinsi et al. highlighted the role of cell groups in the growth of the Home Community Church (HCC) in Palu, where small groups successfully carried out the discipleship process by leading to Christlikeness and training people to become "fishers of men" in their local context. A study on disciple multiplication based on 2 Timothy 2:2 by Suwondo et al. (2025) showed that the tendency of the contemporary church is to emphasize structural growth rather than spiritual growth through reproductive discipleship. Their research affirms that the principle of layered faith inheritance taught by Paul to Timothy is a biblical foundation for a healthy and sustainable church, where disciple multiplication is not merely a ministry strategy but the very essence of the church's mission.

The novelty of this research lies in the integration of the concept of cell group multiplication with the theology of the Great Commission and the missional church approach in the context of modern church planting. An interdisciplinary approach that combines theology, ecclesiology, group sociology, and contemporary contextual studies is needed to fully understand how cell groups can function effectively from a missional perspective. Tucker (2016) in his research in *Verbum et Ecclesia* affirms that although many churches currently have a dual structure consisting of large worship services and satellite small groups, research shows that they have not yet used this dual combination effectively from a missional perspective, thus not optimally fulfilling the *missio Dei*. An interdisciplinary approach combining group sociology, church history, ecclesiology, and contemporary contextual studies can significantly enhance the missional effectiveness of congregations.

The research questions of this study are: (1) What is the theological basis for cell group multiplication based on the Great Commission? (2) How are cell group multiplication strategies applied in church planting? This study aims to describe the theological basis of cell group multiplication based on the Great Commission and to analyze its implementation strategies in church planting. Theoretically, this research contributes to the development of practical theology, particularly in the fields of missiology and ecclesiology. Practically, the results of this research are expected to serve as a strategic reference for local churches in developing cell group-based church planting. This research is also expected to encourage a paradigm shift in church ministry, from a model centered on programs and facilities toward a model centered on empowering every congregation member as mission agents.

## **METHODS**

This research uses a qualitative method with a library research approach. This approach was chosen because it allows researchers to explore and analyze in depth theological literature, scientific journals, and biblical studies relevant to the research topic. As affirmed by Ronal et al. (2025), library research in practical theology enables researchers to integrate various theological and scientific sources to formulate a contextual and applicable model for the contemporary church. The research was conducted through the collection of theological literature, analysis of indexed scientific journals, study of missiology books, and systematic and structured study of biblical texts.

The approaches used in this study are practical theology and missiology, with descriptive-interpretative analytical techniques. As explained by Tucker (2016), an interdisciplinary practical theology approach allows the integration of insights from various disciplines including group sociology, church history, ecclesiology, and contemporary contextual studies to understand the phenomenon of church ministry more holistically. The missiological approach provides a framework for understanding

the nature and purpose of the church's mission in the world.

Primary data sources in this study include the Bible as the highest authority in determining the theological basis, as well as relevant theology and missiology books, including classic works such as *The Master Plan of Evangelism* by Robert E. Coleman, and contemporary works on Church Planting Movements by David Garrison and global mission practitioners. Secondary data sources include nationally accredited SINTA theological journals, internationally indexed scientific articles such as *Verbum et Ecclesia*, *HTS Theological Studies*, and *Global Missiology*, as well as supporting books in the fields of missiology and ecclesiology from the last five to ten years. The selection of data sources within this time frame is intended to ensure the relevance and currency of the research findings with the condition of the contemporary church.

Data collection techniques were carried out through literature study, library documentation, and searching indexed scientific journals using specific keywords such as *cell group multiplication*, *church planting*, *Great Commission discipleship*, *missional ecclesiology*, and *reproductive discipleship*. Data analysis was conducted through four stages: reduction of literature data to filter relevant information, classification of theological themes emerging from the data collection, conceptual interpretation of the findings using the framework of practical theology and missiology, and drawing systematic theological conclusions.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

### ***Theological Basis of Cell Group Multiplication***

The theological basis of cell group multiplication originates from two main authorities in the Christian faith: the Great Commission of Jesus Christ in Matthew 28:19-20 and the practice of house communities in the early church as recorded in Acts 2:42-47 and the Pauline epistles. These two biblical foundations complement each other and provide a normative framework for understanding the nature,

purpose, and methods of church planting through cell groups.

### ***The Great Commission as a Mandate for Reproductive Discipleship***

The Great Commission in Matthew 28:19-20 gives a mandate for discipleship that is reproductive. The key word in this text is *matheteusate* (make disciples), which is an aorist imperative that conveys the meaning of an ongoing process of learning and imitation, not merely a momentary action. Coleman (2020) in *The Master Plan of Discipleship* affirms that Jesus' discipleship method during His three and a half years of ministry on earth was a completely relational and reproductive model. Jesus not only taught His disciples, but He lived with them, trained them, and ultimately entrusted the mission to them to be continued to the next generation. Discipleship in the Great Commission is not merely the transfer of theological knowledge, but a life transformation that produces a chain reaction of faith reproduction.

The understanding of the reproductive nature of the Great Commission becomes clearer when linked to 2 Timothy 2:2, where the Apostle Paul instructs Timothy: "And the things you have heard me say in the presence of many witnesses entrust to reliable people who will also be qualified to teach others." Suwondo et al. (2025) in their exegetical study of this text explain that Paul taught a four-generation model of faith inheritance: Paul → Timothy → reliable people → others. This golden model illustrates that healthy and sustainable church growth is impossible without a planned and structured process of faith reproduction. These researchers conclude that the principle of disciple multiplication as taught in 2 Timothy 2:2 is a biblical foundation for a healthy and sustainable church, where disciple multiplication is not merely a ministry strategy but the very essence of the church's mission.

Garrison (2004) defines a Church Planting Movement as "the rapid multiplication of indigenous churches planting other churches that reaches a people group or population segment." The definition quoted by Coles (2026) in his article in the Lausanne Movement clarifies that a CPM is defined as at least four generations of indigenous churches planting new churches in various streams, where each stream reproduces churches. This definition emphasizes that effective church planting does not depend on one location or one leader, but on a continuous multiplication process a process that naturally occurs when every mature disciple is prepared to become a disciple-maker for others. Cell groups become an ideal vehicle for this movement because of their flexible, relational nature and their ease of reproduction in various cultural contexts.

### ***House Communities of the Early Church***

The pattern of house communities in the early church recorded in Acts 2:42-47 and 2:46-47 shows the effectiveness of small groups as a basis for church growth and planting. This text describes that the first congregation "devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer" and "they broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts." Luke records that "every day the Lord added to their number those who were being saved." This pattern shows that church growth did not happen by chance, but as a result of an intensive community life, mutual service, and openness to the presence of new people.

Purdaryanto (2024) in his research on the actualization of household congregations as a church planting strategy found that the practice of house congregations has a strong biblical basis, and household congregations are proven to be inexpensive, effective, and easy to multiply. The novelty of this research lies in the use of household congregations as a church planting strategy with an emphasis on discipleship through household congregations as a means of planting churches. This finding strengthens the argument that the house community model essentially the same as cell groups is not a modern innovation but a restoration of the

original pattern of church growth that has proven effective since the first century AD.

In Romans 16:5, Paul greets "the church that meets at their house" (Priscilla and Aquila). This mention shows that the homes of believers in the New Testament era were not merely dwelling places, but centers of worship, teaching, fellowship, and mission. This model differs significantly from the church model that is heavily dependent on permanent worship buildings and professional leaders. The cell group model proposed in this study instead returns the church to its essence as a community of believers living together, serving one another, and being sent together into the world an ecclesiology that missional theologians call *missional ecclesiology*.

### ***Strategies of Cell Group Multiplication in Church Planting***

The strategy of cell group multiplication in church planting cannot be understood as a set of techniques or methods that can be applied uniformly in all contexts. Instead, this strategy must be understood as an integrated theological approach encompassing four main pillars: relational evangelism, reproductive discipleship, leadership multiplication, and the formation of new congregations. These four pillars are interrelated and must be implemented simultaneously to produce effective and sustainable church planting.

### ***Relational Evangelism: Evangelism Rooted in Community***

Cell groups function as a means of evangelism based on relationships and community. This approach differs fundamentally from the mass evangelism model that relies on preaching to large crowds or the individualistic personal evangelism model. In the relational evangelism model, evangelism occurs organically through existing networks of interpersonal relationships family, friends, neighbors, coworkers which are then expanded through encounters in the context of small groups.

Chukwuemeka (2024) shows that small group evangelism and church planting have emerged as effective strategies for reaching and discipling individuals in a fast-paced, technology-driven world. This approach leverages the power of relational connections, communal unity, and a friendly atmosphere to facilitate spiritual growth. This approach becomes increasingly relevant amid the crisis of social alienation plaguing modern society, where many people feel lonely even though they are constantly connected technologically. Cell groups provide a safe space where people can ask questions, share burdens, and celebrate joys together with others who are walking the same faith journey.

Research on the strategy of preaching the gospel through cell communities at Mahanaim Community Church Semarang conducted by Luhur (2024) identified that obstacles to cell community growth can be overcome through an inclusive approach and awareness of each member's role. This finding shows that relational evangelism does not happen automatically simply by forming cell groups; a high level of awareness is needed from each member that the existence of cell groups is intended to reach those who do not yet believe, not merely to meet the spiritual needs of existing members.

A compelling example of relational evangelism implementation can be seen in the implementation of the Parish Evangelization Cells System (PECS) in the Archdiocese of St. Paul and Minneapolis. More than 1,220 small groups with over 16,000 participants were formed during the Lenten season in that archdiocese. The PECS model is designed to strengthen parish life through small groups and encourage people to share their faith and hope in Jesus Christ with one another, and then with the wider community. One small group member reported that a relative of his began talking to his mail carrier about the love of Jesus, and over time, the mail carrier asked about joining the Catholic Church. "That's spreading the good news from door to door," he commented a perfect illustration of how relational evangelism works in practice.

### ***Reproductive Discipleship: A Stage-by-Stage Model Toward Multiplication***

Every member of a cell group is prepared step by step to become a new leader capable of discipling others. This concept of reproductive discipleship requires a clear and measurable framework for the stages of a disciple's development. Comiskey (2023) in *Home Cell Group Explosion* defines a cell group as "a group of three to fifteen people who meet weekly outside the church building to practice evangelism, build community, and grow spiritually with the goal of multiplying the group." This definition explicitly places multiplication as the ultimate goal of the cell group's existence, not merely as an option or secondary consequence of group growth.

Ronal et al. (2025) in their research on generative discipleship strategies based on the hermeneutics of Ephesians 4:11-13 found that generative discipleship which emphasizes the multiplication of disciples through training, mentoring, and commissioning aligns with the fivefold ministry structure outlined in Ephesians 4 and is relevant in addressing the needs of the contemporary church. This strategy is implemented effectively through small groups, leadership training, and family- and community-based discipleship.

Comiskey developed a stage model called "D-1 to D-6" to understand the discipleship process in the cell group paradigm. Stage D-1 is a disciple who participates in a cell group and follows the training track, where they are baptized and taught to obey all that Christ commanded. Stage D-2 is a disciple who serves as a team member in the cell group, practicing what they have learned. Stage D-3 is a disciple who gathers people and leads a cell group after graduating from the training track. Stage D-4 occurs when a disciple has developed another disciple who multiplies themselves and leads their own cell group, whom Comiskey calls a multiplication leader. This process does not stop at D-4; some will become part-time staff (D-5) and others will plant new churches (D-6). The D-1 to D-6 framework provides clear guidance for a believer through a well-defined equipping process.

This stage model is very important because it addresses one of the most serious weaknesses of many cell group efforts: the absence of a clear pathway for ordinary members to grow into leaders capable of multiplying groups. Without a clear pathway, cell groups tend to stagnate, with the same members meeting week after week without ever being prepared to start new groups.

### ***Leadership Multiplication: Decentralization of Authority and Empowerment***

Leadership in the cell group model is not centralized in the pastor or a single leadership figure, but develops through a systematic cadreship process. This principle is a practical implication of the doctrine of the "priesthood of all believers" (1 Peter 2:9). When every believer is seen as a priest who has direct access to God and responsibility to serve others, there is no longer a sharp dichotomy between clergy and laity in the context of mission and leadership.

Research by Kurniadhi (2025) on the effectiveness of small groups in the Baptist Churches of Indonesia identified that the main obstacle in the implementation of small groups lies in the weak system of leadership development and ongoing member training. These findings indicate that leadership in cell groups cannot develop spontaneously; a planned system is needed to identify, train, empower, and support new leaders. This includes basic training on how to facilitate group meetings, how to lead Bible studies, how to lead prayer, and how to handle interpersonal conflicts.

The training program for current and prospective leaders of adult cell communities conducted by the Indonesian Baptist Church Candi Semarang shows that systematic leadership training is an urgent need for the sustainability of cell groups. This program aims to equip existing cell group leaders with knowledge and skills about leading groups, while also preparing prospective leaders who are burdened to serve in adult cell communities. This approach recognizes that cell groups are not only a fellowship forum but also a strategic means to birth

new leaders capable of continuing the church's mission (Pudjiastuti, 2025).

Comiskey (2022) in *Leadership Explosion* affirms that without leadership, cell groups will fail to thrive. The best cell-based churches have realized this fact and have developed intentional strategies for raising up new leaders. One key to the success of cell group multiplication is the existence of a clear training pathway, from the identification of potential leaders, basic training, mentoring in actual ministry, to release to lead new groups. Comiskey also highlights that cell group leaders need to be equipped with time-tested leadership principles, including the ability to facilitate discussion, shepherd members, and mobilize active participation.

Findings from global research on Church Planting Movements (CPM) provide an additional perspective on the importance of local leadership. Garrison (2004) identified that local leadership is one of ten universal elements present in every CPM. Local leaders born and raised in the local cultural context have a much deeper understanding of the values, norms, and mindsets of the community they wish to reach. Missionaries involved in CPMs often speak of the self-discipline required to coach church planters rather than doing the church planting work themselves, a lesson that is very difficult for many leaders accustomed to a centralized leadership model.

#### ***Formation of New Congregations: From Cell Group to Church***

The ultimate goal of cell group multiplication is the development of a faith community into an independent new congregation or church. This is the culmination of the entire multiplication process, where what began as a small group meeting in someone's home eventually transforms into a church that has the capacity to worship, teach, fellowship, serve, and preach the gospel independently.

In the Indonesian context, research on the planting of cell communities in the Rancaekek and Soreang areas of Bandung Regency by Alexander et al. (2022) proves that cell community worship can become the forerunner of the birth of a church of God, especially in areas not yet reached by the gospel. This research shows that in areas that do not yet have church buildings or structured faith communities, the presence of a cell group meeting regularly in a member's home can be a starting point for church growth. So far, the cell community worship that has been implemented has received positive responses from the Christian families served, and those who do not yet have a community to grow in faith show enthusiasm when their homes are used as places to hold cell community worship.

Manala (2024) in his research on servant leadership and the utilization of cell groups at the Maranatha Reformed Church of Christ, South Africa, identified that cell groups can be a necessary tool for the church to achieve and sustain the growth it needs. This research makes a meaningful contribution to mainstream churches and the theoretical study of church growth by revealing the resilience and dynamism for church growth that resides in the principles and practices of servant leadership and cell group utilization. These findings are relevant for churches in Indonesia that may be decades or even centuries old and face the challenges of declining membership and growth stagnation.

#### ***Relevance and Challenges of the Cell Group Model for the Contemporary Church***

The cell group model has high relevance for the contemporary church, especially in the context of the modern urban environment and the digital generation. However, this relevance does not mean that its implementation will proceed smoothly without challenges. A realistic understanding of these challenges, as well as strategies to overcome them, is an important part of the successful implementation of the cell group model.

### ***Relevance of the Model***

First, cell groups are more adaptive to changing times. In an era where people's lifestyles are increasingly mobile and less tied to specific geographical locations, the cell group model that can meet in various places homes, cafes, workplaces, public spaces, or even online provides flexibility that the large worship service model centered in church buildings does not have.

Second, cell groups are more relational in their approach to ministry. Research by Barasa (2024) in Uganda shows that effective cell groups build close fellowship among their members, creating a sense of belonging and shared responsibility. Positive impacts of cell group ministry include church unity, increased congregation size, conversion of non-believers, and growth in prayer life and Bible reading culture among members.

Third, cell groups are easier to reproduce compared to the centralized ministry model. The traditional church model requires large investments in the form of buildings, worship equipment, full-time staff, and various complex programs. The cell group model, in contrast, can begin very simply a leader, a few interested people, a home or meeting space, and a Bible. This simplicity makes multiplication much faster and more accessible.

Fourth, cell groups effectively reach the digital generation seeking authentic connection. Today's young people, although very connected technologically, often experience a crisis of alienation and a longing for authentic community. Cell groups provide a space where they can be themselves, ask honestly, and build meaningful relationships something difficult to achieve in large, impersonal worship services.

### ***Implementation Challenges***

Although the cell group model has many advantages, its implementation is not without various challenges. Based on research conducted in various contexts, at least three main challenges need to be anticipated.

The first challenge is the imbalance between cell groups and work or other responsibilities. Barasa (2024) found that one of the factors causing the decline of cell group ministry is the failure of Christians to balance cell groups with work. Amid the fast-paced demands of modern life, many people feel overwhelmed by busy schedules, so cell groups often become the easiest activity to sacrifice. Solutions to this challenge are not simple but can include flexibility in meeting schedules, cell groups based on work or community environments, and reducing non-essential church program loads.

The second challenge is the limited appreciation of cell groups as the core unit connecting family and church. Barasa (2024) also found that many members do not see cell groups as the foundation of their church life. Cell groups are viewed merely as an "add-on program" alongside weekly worship services, not as the heart of the faith community life. Overcoming this challenge requires a significant paradigm shift, where the church consistently teaches and practices that healthy church life is centered on cell groups, while the large worship service is a celebration of the existing cell communities together.

The third challenge is cell group leaders who lack adequate training and mentoring. Barasa (2024) identified that a lack of training and mentoring for cell group leaders is one of the factors causing ministry decline. Many cell group leaders are placed in leadership positions without sufficient preparation, leaving them feeling unconfident and incompetent in carrying out their duties. The solution to this challenge is the development of a sustainable and tiered leadership training system, such as that proposed by Comiskey in the D-1 to D-6 model and by Rojas in the cell group leader training course.

### ***Critical Evaluation and Future Opportunities***

In addition to implementation challenges, it is also important to critically evaluate the assumptions underlying the cell group model. One assumption that needs testing is whether cell groups always produce quality discipleship. There is a risk that in the effort to multiply groups quickly, the church sacrifices the depth of discipleship for the quantity of numerical increase. Keener and Foster (2025) developed a mathematical model to understand Disciple Making Movements (DMM) that emphasizes that the most controllable factor for disciples is the prioritization of time on more responsive individuals and on existing close relationships. Their model explains that different optimization strategies are needed for different contexts, depending on the average level of responsiveness and relational connectivity within a society. The implication of these findings is that there is no one-size-fits-all model. Churches must be wise in adapting their strategies to their local contexts.

The future opportunities for the cell group model in Indonesia are very great. Data from various studies show that there are still many areas in Indonesia that have not been reached by the gospel, as found by Alexander et al. (2022) in Rancaekek and Soreang. In areas like these, building church buildings with all their facilities may be unrealistic or inefficient. Cell groups starting from people's homes, with local leadership trained simply but adequately, offer a church planting model that is much more suitable for the context. In addition, the flexibility of cell groups to meet online as was done in the planting in Rancaekek and Soreang in response to the COVID-19 pandemic opens up the possibility of reaching geographically remote areas or those with limited transportation access.

### **CONCLUSION**

Based on the research results and discussion that have been comprehensively described, this study arrives at three main conclusions.

First, the Great Commission is a solid and undeniable theological basis for cell group multiplication in church planting. The reproductive discipleship mandate in Matthew 28:19-20, reinforced by the four-generation principle of faith inheritance in 2 Timothy 2:2 and the pattern of house communities in the early church (Acts 2:42-47; 2:46-47; Rom. 16:5), provides a strong biblical foundation for the cell group-based ministry model. The principle of disciple multiplication as taught in 2 Timothy 2:2 is not merely a ministry strategy but the very essence of the church's mission, birthing new faith communities through an ongoing process of spiritual transformation.

Second, effective cell group multiplication strategies in church planting encompass four interrelated pillars: relational evangelism that utilizes existing relationship networks; reproductive discipleship with the D-1 to D-6 stage model; leadership multiplication through a structured and sustainable cadreship system; and the formation of new congregations as the ultimate goal of the entire multiplication process. These four pillars must be implemented simultaneously and in an integrated manner to produce effective and sustainable church planting.

Third, the integration of the concept of cell group multiplication with the theology of the Great Commission and the missional church approach produces a contextual, adaptive, and sustainable church planting model for the contemporary church. This model is not only relevant for the modern urban context and the digital generation, but also offers solutions to classic challenges such as growth stagnation, dependence on specific leadership figures, and resource limitations for building church buildings.

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