

**Diagnosis, Dialogue, and Decision: A Threefold Process of Revitalization For the Illinois Great Rivers Conference** by David O. Kueker. Doctor of Ministry project, School of Theology, Fuller Theological Seminary, 2007. UMC content reader: Craig Kennet Miller, GBOD.  
<https://disciplewalk.com/Resources.html>

**Project Introduction** Three seminars provide information for the adoption of the innovation of “following Jesus as a United Methodist.” They are designed for small churches.

*Diagnosis: recognizing the disciple-making methods of Jesus now in your context.*

*Dialogue: understand the processes systems use to prevent change, and overcome them.*

*Decision: specific methods to encourage adoption of the innovation of disciple making.*

## **Chapter One: Systemic Problems**

1. The medication I take is made up of two substances. Active Ingredient(s) cause the desired change and the Filler is an inactive substance used to support the active ingredient(s).

2. Chapter One, written in 2005, described four systemic problems which prevent successful evangelism and numerical growth within the IGRC:

**1. Not Making Disciples:** Churches fail to thrive when the Great Commission is not the central priority. It is also possible that we do not know how to make disciples; we confuse the “active ingredients” with the “filler.” The commands of Jesus to his disciples teach us how to “fish for people.” This includes the Great Commission itself. Can we footnote what we do to what Jesus said and did?

John Wesley priority: *You have nothing to do but save souls. Therefore spend and be spent in this work. And go always, not only to those that want you, but to those that want you most. Observe: It is not your business to preach so many times, and to take care of this or that society; but to save as many souls as you can; to bring as many sinners as you possibly can to repentance, and with all your power to build them up in that holiness without which they cannot see the Lord.*

T4T priority: There are two kinds of people in this world: *people who need to become disciples and disciples who need to become disciple-makers.*

### **2. An institutional worldview inhibits disciple-making as well as innovation.**

**Institutional Mindset:** *perceiving the church as an institution rather than as an organic, living entity.* (John 2:18-22; a “disciple-making institution” is an oxymoron. The institutional Church seeks to fulfill the will of God with an institutional response. An institution can have a life-cycle because it is not alive; if a church is more than an institution, then - like a flock or a family - it is reborn with each new birth.

The Institutional Two-Step:

Step 1: create an institution to more efficiently fulfill the mission of God.

Step 2: delegate obedience to the commands of Jesus to the institution and support the institution in its work. (When this fails, blame the institution.)

This is how the command “*love your neighbor*” given to the Christian by Jesus becomes the Church needing to “*love the neighborhood around the church building.*”

In the UMC, one exception to institutionality is the National Plan for Hispanic/Latino Ministry’s strategy for raising up Lay Missioners, ¶ 271. Junius Dotson’s *SeeAllThePeople.org* is close.

**3. Prairie DNA:** *focus innovation on fixing “the way we have always done it before” so that it works today.* (This approach ignores the true active ingredients.) The goal of Prairie DNA is to keep the church as close as possible to the way it was in the days of the second Great Awakening. The old ways fail today because the world has changed.

**4. Stranger Evangelism:** *evangelizing strangers rather than utilizing existing relationship networks.* (The USA is at 3 degrees of separation; everyone is within two handshakes.)

Robert Putnam's research indicates that American networks of engagement are breaking down and that this loss of "social capital" is the primary cause of many serious social problems. As the church is the primary builder of social networks, the decrease in social capital is both a cause and a result of the decline of church participation in America. The church is failing in the work of building and maintaining the bridges of God between people.

Rodney Stark: *Proselytizing bore fruit only when it followed or coincided with the formation of strong social attachments, typically family ties or close personal friendships. Successful conversion was not so much about selling beliefs as it was about building ties ...*

Josh Hunt: *... people are not interested in a friendly church; they are looking for friends.*

Mike Frost: *I've lost count of the number of Christians who've told me they either stopped attending church or left their church to join another one because they couldn't make any friends there. They report that the church people were friendly enough. They were hospitable and welcoming. As one person told me, "They're nice to you, but no one becomes your friend." And it hurts when all that friendliness leads only to friendlessness.*

<https://mikefrost.net/the-lonely-crowd-churches-dying-due-to-friendlessness/>

***It's not the pandemic:*** A 2005 House2House presentation by Barna associate Thom Black reports Barna research trends that only a third of highly committed Christians will practice their faith within a local church by 2020. [https://disciplewalk.com/files/DWalk\\_Barna\\_Revolutions\\_Audio.mp3](https://disciplewalk.com/files/DWalk_Barna_Revolutions_Audio.mp3)

## **Chapter Two: Discipleship Systems**

1.1 Craig Miller defines a faith community as made up of two cooperative, interacting components: worship and a discipleship system: *The primary evangelistic strategy of the 21st century is the establishment of new faith communities . . . A faith community is created when a worship experience is tied to a discipleship system. A worshiping group without a discipleship system is not a faith community; it is simply a place to worship God. A faith community intentionally creates settings that link worship to discipleship and spiritual formation.* (Many discipleship systems lack training in evangelism or ongoing mentoring by disciple makers as a component. *Failure to thrive* is also a major problem which is met by training laity to *love one another*.)

1.2 The cell church uses "equipping tracks" which mature new converts to become disciple makers and cell leaders as quickly as within 1 year. The cell is defined as a small "family type" relational group whose primary task is evangelism. A potential convert first attends the cell rather than worship, as attenders must wait over 1 hour to get a seat in the crowded sanctuaries. Cells are managed by systems, such as Yoido's 5x5 and ICM's G12, to keep the discipleship system running smoothly while making new disciples from 20,000 up to 700,000 members.

1.3 In a discipleship system, converts learn behavior obedient to the commands of Christ, including the command to make disciples in the Great Commission and teach them "to observe all that I have commanded you." The end result of the Great Commission is not a new disciple or a better, improved disciple, but a disciple maker. A disciple maker functions as a spiritual parent assisting a convert to grow through stages of dependent infancy, curious childhood, dramatic adolescence into calm adult parenthood. Grandparents help the parents with the grandchildren.

1.4 Research by George Barna showed that only 17% of church attenders participate in Sunday School, a bible study or prayer meeting - anything outside of worship. *(Therefore, 83% of church attenders are probably at the dependency/infancy stage of the discipleship system, as they are active only in worship.)*

1.5 The purpose of every member of the Elim Central Church of El Salvador:

1. *I have a purpose.*
2. *My purpose is winning souls.*
3. *I fulfill my purpose best in a group.*
4. *I will never be satisfied until I fulfill my purpose.*
5. *I have no promise of tomorrow.*

Cell churches believe, as Jesus said, "*The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few; pray therefore the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest*" (Luke 10:2). The harvest is ready; what is lacking are laborers willing and trained for labor in the harvest. The focus is on people, not machines.

## **Seminar One: Diagnosis**

1.1 The Center for Parish Development Principle for Church Growth: this statistically valid study of United Methodist Churches found that there was ***only one essential characteristic***, found ***always*** in every growing church ***without exception*** and ***never*** found in any declining or plateaued church:

The *laity* are *excited* about what is *happening* in *their* church.

This is about *leverage, emotions, actions* and *ownership*.

1.2 Clergy leaders are stewards of lay excitement: *where do laity get excited? How are clergy present?*

1.3 Revival doesn't happen until it reaches the laity.

1.4 Are small churches doomed and at the end of their life cycle? Quote: *The growth rate of churches decreased with increasing size. This fact in and of itself came as no great surprise, because in large churches the percentages represent many more people. But when we converted the percentages into raw numbers, we were dumbfounded. Churches in the smallest size category (under 100 in attendance) had won an average of 32 new people over the past five years; churches with 100-200 in worship also won 32; churches between 200-300 average 39 new individuals; churches between 300-400 won 25. So a 'small' church wins just as many people for Christ as a 'large' one, and what's more, two churches with 200 in worship on Sunday will win twice as many new people as one church with 400 in attendance.*

**Why?** (Christian Schwarz, *Natural Church Development*, 46-48.) The top three negative correlations for numerical growth were Liberal Theology, Traditionalism and (larger) church size. (*Ibid*, 28-29.)

1.5 Quote: When organic church planter Neil Cole, 42, landed in Long Beach from Alta Loma, his initial brainstorm was to birth a coffee shop--à la the Jesus Movement--in a storefront he had rented on busy Cherry Avenue. He said God had told him: *Why don't you just go to the coffeehouse where the lost people are already?* "Instead of trying to convert them from the coffeehouse they really love to our coffeehouse so that we could then convert them to Christ, we just went and hung out at the coffeehouse where they were already at," Cole recounts.

[https://disciplewalk.com/files/Jesus\\_with\\_an\\_iced\\_latte\\_article\\_by\\_steve\\_lawson\\_full\\_text.pdf](https://disciplewalk.com/files/Jesus_with_an_iced_latte_article_by_steve_lawson_full_text.pdf)

## **Seminar Two: Dialogue**

1.1 The *Diffusion of Innovations* (Everett Rogers, Geoffrey Moore) is concerned with "how to bring about change in a social structure and how to speed up the rate of adoption of that change." Diffusion of Innovations research indicates that 84% of any given population group are disinterested in change for the sake of change. And this 84% of any given population group are influenced toward change ***only by conversations with trusted peers***. *Conversations between friends change lives.*

1.2 **Structural Principle:** *The problem is not to change or replace structure but to utilize existing structures for disciple making.* Systems usually prevent changes to structures.

1.3 When Senge's reinforcing loop for change is perceived as a means of differentiation (Bowen, Friedman), congregational anxiety resolves (Steinke) and the innovation can spread. 1 Corinthians 12 advocates for a fully differentiated church with every person using their spiritual gifts.

## **Seminar Three: Decision**

1. All that is necessary - from ¶126 of the 2008 Book of Discipline of the United Methodist Church: ***“Every layperson is called to carry out the Great Commission (Matthew 28:18-20); every layperson is called to be missional.”*** (How are we implementing this?)
2. Best rephrasing: *“I tell them 2 things: #1. Shepherds don't make sheep; sheep make sheep. #2. Every Sunday morning, right before the benediction, I thank the laity for their ministries.”*
3. *Missiologist C. Peter Wagner suggested that 5% to 10% of worship attenders have the spiritual gift of evangelism. Given our total conference worship attendance post disaffiliation, this can be as many as 9,012 persons. What are we now doing to develop and mobilize these gifted persons?*
4. Yoido Full Gospel Central Church pastor Yongii Cho: *You know, we don't do evangelism in Korea the way you do it in the West... We have 50,000 cell groups and each group will love two people to Christ within the next year. They select someone who's not a Christian, whom they can pray for, love and serve. They bring meals, help sweep out the person's store— whatever it takes to show they really care for them. When a person asks, “Why are you treating me so well?” our people answer, “Jesus told us that we're supposed to do good to all men, and we want you to know that we love you, and so does Jesus.” After three or four months of such love, the hardest soul softens up and surrenders to Christ.*
5. Ideally, laity lead in system change; clergy work as managers to maintain stability and ease anxiety.
6. **Rule of Three:** if three laity are not interested in leading a change effort, it's not time yet. Wait.
7. A better understanding of spiritual gifts: Saddleback's S.H.A.P.E. model = SPIRITUAL GIFTS grow from the HEART (who/what you love), ABILITY (what you can do), your PERSONALITY (preferences, MBTI) and are validated by EXPERIENCE (been there, done that, often. No problem.)
8. The *Prayer Tool* organizes disciple making along existing networks; it is part of the *JUMP Group Discipleship System*, based on Neil Cole's *Life Transformation Groups*, which are themselves based on Wesley's Bands. The *4 Cornered Room* is an adaptation for UMCs of Saddleback's discipleship system.

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***CERTIFIED LAY MINISTERS*** serve churches with a Ministry Team and a Supervising Clergy.

Priority #1: Certified lay ministers provide sermons for worship.

Priority #2: Certified lay ministers are assigned “to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ” (Ephesians 4:12; cf. 1 Corinthians 12:7) within a local church, which includes preaching. **All ministry tasks without exception are performed by members of the ministry team rather than the CLM whenever possible.**

Priority #3. There are no other priorities. The main thing is keeping the main thing the main thing.

Ideally, CLMs remain active in their home church while serving a neighbor church, attending worship in both churches weekly.