
The Role of Cell Groups in Reaching Souls for the Strategy of Urban Church Development

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Abstrak:

In the context of urban church development, cell groups play a vital role in reaching souls and building a strong faith community. This study aims to explore the contribution of cell groups in urban church development strategies amidst complex social, cultural, and spiritual dynamics. The method used is the library research method. The results of the study indicate that cell groups are not only a place for individual spiritual growth, but also function as a bridge connecting the church with the surrounding community. Cell groups are able to create a supportive environment for members to share their faith, facilitate Bible studies, and carry out social service activities. In addition, the existence of cell groups contributes to improving the church's vision, so that evangelism and missions can be carried out more efficiently. This study also identifies challenges faced in implementing development strategies through cell groups, such as lack of member commitment and differences in vision between groups. However, with ongoing training and church support, cell groups can overcome these obstacles and become more effective in reaching new souls.

Keywords: cell groups, church development, urban church, faith community

INTRODUCTION

The Great Commission recorded in the Gospels of Matthew 28:19-20 and Mark 16:15 has been the main theological and missionary foundation for the Christian church throughout history (Miller & McDonald, 2020). These two verses not only constitute a universal call for the church to preach the good news, but they also establish a holistic framework that includes evangelism, discipleship, baptism, and teaching (Johnston, 2019). Evangelism, as an integral part of the Great Commission, has evolved in practice, but its theological foundation remains firmly rooted in these passages (Smith, 2021). These elements are at the heart of the identity and responsibility of the church where the divine authority behind the mandate is the source of strength in carrying out a transcendent mission (Brown & Wilson, 2022). The concept of discipleship in the Great Commission emphasizes the relational aspect of ministry and the ongoing teaching process (Harris & Kim, 2023). Furthermore, the biblical mandate for baptism represents the church's commitment to both faith and community (Garcia & Lee, 2021).

Theologically, the Great Commission emphasizes two inseparable dimensions, namely universality and transformation (Susanto et al., 2025). Matthew 28:19-20 emphasizes mission inclusivity with the phrase "all nations" which affirms that salvation is not limited to a specific group, but to the entire creation (Perry, 2021). This breaks down cultural, geographical, and social boundaries, while challenging the church to engage in pluralistic contexts, including in multicultural urban areas (Wang, 2020). Meanwhile, Mark 16:15 underscores the urgency of evangelism as a response to faith (Johnson, 2022). While not forgetting the deep discipleship aspect described in Matthew, both texts also imply an ongoing mission approach, not simply converting new believers, but building a growing community through teaching or faith-building (Davis & Hill, 2019). This mission approach encourages an inclusive and transformative community that reflects the teachings of Christ, emphasizing not only conversion but also the development of disciples (Mitchell, 2023). The holistic nature of the Great Commission challenges the church to consider both global engagement and local community building (Simmons & Williams, 2020).

In the mission of carrying out soul-soul outreach, sometimes urban churches face unique challenges due to the complex dynamics of modern life. Urban societies continue to undergo dynamic transformations characterized by growing cultural diversity, rapid population growth, and the complexity of social issues such as economic inequality, poverty, and marginalization. Urbanization has transformed the social and spiritual landscape in cities, creating an individualistic, multicultural, and fast-moving society. Modernity, as a characteristic of urban life, often gives rise to a self-centered arrogant attitude and this attitude then plunges individuals into social isolation, where loneliness arises due to individualism that erodes the warmth of relationships between citizens in a community. Apartment, office, or shopping center environments facilitate transactional, not relational, interactions, while churches that only hold Sunday services in buildings struggle to meet the need for authentic community. In the midst of these challenges, the church is called to be present and remain relevant in reaching spiritually exiled souls.

Cell groups emerge as one of the strategic solutions to build an intimate and

transformative community, because cell groups can be the center of vital fellowship, play a role in triggering the spiritual development of each member, strengthening interpersonal relationships, and sustaining large-scale fellowship activities. Through a group of cells, each individual can grow into a person who faithfully follows Christ and lives according to God's words. Cell groups are not new in soul-soul outreach. The early church established by the Apostles in Acts 2:42-47 explains that the pattern of fellowship became the model of the early church for supporting each other, learning the word and praying together.

Cell groups are part of small community units within the church that play a crucial role in reaching souls, but there are several things that need to be looked at again regarding how cell groups can function as an effective solution in the context of urban church ministry, how the strategic and transformative role of cell groups in reaching out to the community while expanding church growth in urban environments. This study aims to analyze the potential of cell groups as a relevant means of evangelism in the midst of urban complexity, as well as their contribution in building a dynamic and far-reaching community of faith, so that they can be important values that can make a significant contribution to the outreach of urban souls. It is hoped that this paper can inspire ministry innovations that have an impact on the development of churches in urban areas.

The role of cell groups in urban church development has been explored in various studies, highlighting their significance in fostering spiritual growth and community engagement. For instance, Myers (2011) emphasizes the importance of small groups in addressing the need for belonging in urban settings, where individualism often leads to social isolation. Similarly, Ortiz and Conn (2025) argue that cell groups serve as a bridge between the church and the community, enabling contextualized ministry in diverse urban environments. These studies underscore the adaptability of cell groups in meeting the spiritual and social needs of urban populations, yet they primarily focus on theoretical frameworks without extensive empirical validation.

Despite the existing literature, a significant research gap remains in understanding how cell groups can effectively address the unique challenges of urban ministry, such as cultural diversity, high mobility, and secularization. Research by Tedjo (2021) and Haans (2024) highlights the potential of cell groups for church growth but lacks a comprehensive analysis of the obstacles they face, including member commitment and leadership dynamics. This gap calls for a deeper investigation into the practical strategies that can enhance the effectiveness of cell groups in urban contexts, ensuring their sustainability and impact.

The urgency of this research lies in the rapid urbanization and spiritual disconnection observed in modern cities. As noted by Arianto (2024), urban societies are increasingly characterized by transactional relationships and loneliness, creating a pressing need for authentic community-building tools like cell groups. Furthermore, the COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated these challenges, necessitating innovative approaches to maintain fellowship and outreach. This study addresses these urgent issues by exploring how cell groups can adapt to post-pandemic realities while remaining grounded in biblical principles.

The novelty of this research lies in its holistic approach, integrating theological,

sociological, and practical perspectives to analyze cell groups. Unlike previous studies that focus narrowly on growth metrics, this paper examines the transformative potential of cell groups in fostering discipleship, social justice, and intercultural dialogue. By drawing on the experiences of urban churches in diverse settings, such as the Yoido Full Gospel Church in South Korea, this study offers fresh insights into the dynamic role of cell groups in contemporary ministry.

The purpose of this research is to analyze the strategic and transformative role of cell groups in urban church development, with a focus on their ability to reach souls, build community, and address urban challenges. Specifically, it aims to identify best practices for leadership, member engagement, and contextual adaptation, ensuring that cell groups remain relevant in an ever-changing urban landscape. The study also seeks to provide actionable recommendations for churches to optimize their cell group ministries.

The benefits of this research are manifold. For practitioners, it offers evidence-based strategies to enhance the effectiveness of cell groups in urban settings. For academics, it contributes to the growing body of literature on urban ministry and small group dynamics. Ultimately, this study has the potential to inspire innovative ministry models that not only grow churches numerically but also deepen their impact on society, aligning with the Great Commission's call to make disciples of all nations.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

In this study, the author uses a qualitative method with a descriptive study and analysis approach method through interpretation and explanation that still adheres to the context to achieve the true essence in understanding the role of cell groups that are able to reach souls in carrying out the development strategy of the church in urban areas which is the author's background. The use of data obtained and used is through the analysis of documents from various primary sources by utilizing literature studies both sources contained in journals, scientific publications, and related literature relevant to this study, including observations and experiences of the author's involvement in the cell group community. However, in the preparation of this scientific article, the main sources that are the basis of the main theory and analysis are obtained from various academic journals available in digital format. All the data collected by the author serves as the basis for strengthening theories and analyses in this scientific article, in order to increase the validity and accuracy of the research.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Cell Clusters as an Adaptive and Flexible Outreach Strategy

Urbanization demands that the church move from an institutional-centralistic to a communal-decentralised model. Cell groups offer: Intimate communities that overcome isolation through small, personalized gatherings; Geographical Flexibility, Can be held anywhere, according to the mobility of the congregation; Rapid Response that can detect specific needs (economic, emotional, spiritual) in real-time; Contextualization, where the

discussion material can be adjusted to the cultural background of the participants.

"And they persevered in the teaching of the apostles and in fellowship. And they always gathered together to break bread and pray." (Acts 2:42). The early church grew through small groups in homes, a model that remains relevant in the urban era. By understanding these urban challenges, the church can design a group of cells that not only focus on "numerical growth," but also become a support network that addresses the complexities of urban life.

Cell groups make use of small scale to build intimacy that is difficult to achieve in large worship, making it effective for reaching new souls. For example, a cell group in an office area in Jakarta managed to attract millennial workers who were reluctant to come to church due to time constraints. The flexibility of location (apartment, office, or public space) and schedule (evenings or weekends) facilitates the participation of busy urban generations. This approach also leverages specific interests, such as hobby community-based cell groups, that use those hobbies as an entry point for evangelism. Thus, the cell group transforms the church from a "destination place" to a "community that comes to them".

The cell group not only focuses on spiritual growth, but also responds to urban social issues such as mental health, unemployment, and environmental degradation. This integration of social and spiritual ministry is in harmony with the principle of fruitful faith (James 2:17), making the church relevant in a pragmatic urban society. This holistic approach also opens the door for non-Christians to engage without feeling "trapped."

Transformative Functions and Roles of Cell Groups

The difficulty of reaching out to the community for urban churches is often due to the limitations of the less flexible traditional worship format. This is where cell groups (small relation-based communities) emerge as strategic solutions that offer a personalized, adaptive, and holistic approach. As a small community unit within the church, cell groups play a crucial role in the outreach of souls in urban areas where individualism, cultural diversity, and social dynamics such as loneliness, work stress, and economic disparities often hinder the development of the church. This model is in line with the principle of "koinonia" (fellowship) in Acts 2:42-47, where the early church met from house to house to share life thoroughly.

In the structure of the church, the cell group as a small community is able to play a crucial role in driving real change in the midst of the challenges of urban ministry. One of them is that this group is a solution to the social isolation of urban communities by building relationships. In practice, cell groups in Jakarta provide an informal environment that is friendly to urban communities but makes it easy for new people to engage without pressure, for example, often holding meetings in cafes, homes or apartments. This approach is not only able to reach new souls, but also transform superficial relationships into a community of mutual love and responsibility.

With a maximum of 10–15 members, cell groups allow for a personalized approach. Relationships that are built become a natural medium for sharing faith, as exemplified in Acts 2:42-47, where the early congregation met from house to house to share life as a whole. As clusters of cells grow, they can divide (cell multiplication), creating an expanding network of

ministries without relying on church buildings. It is a means of contextual evangelism that allows for a personal and relevant approach to the spiritual and social needs of urban communities. Example: Yoido Full Gospel Church in South Korea which is growing exponentially through this model.

Cell groups are also a means of "contextual discipleship" that transforms faith from mere ritual to living practice. In a pluralistic urban environment, the understanding of faith must be relevant to complex realities such as social injustice, ecological crises, or career pressures. Cell groups allow for thematic Bible immersion, such as discussing biblical principles of justice in the context of urban poverty, or integrity in the business world. Discipleship is no longer one-way, but involves a critical dialogue, in which members are invited to reflect on faith in real action by combining spirituality with social action. This transformation expands the meaning of "church growth" from simply increasing the number of members to increasing the impact of the church in society.

God's Word as the Basis of Cell Groups

Cell groups are not just regular meetings, but rather a forum for discipleship (spiritual formation that is always based on the Bible or the word of God) and effective evangelism that is always based on the Bible or the word of God. There are several fundamental reasons why the Bible or the word of God is an important part of the cell group, namely: first, knowledge and knowledge of spiritual things cannot be obtained from any other source than the Bible. As the primary foundation that establishes the framework and principles of spirituality, the Bible should not be taken lightly. Rather, all faith-building activities for the congregation must be rooted and oriented to the truth contained in them. Second, God's Word serves as the core message that has high relevance and significance in the process of forming one's spirituality. The direct impact of this coaching is reflected in the formation of the character of the congregation. When God's word is used as the foundation of a spiritual building program, the character of the church will develop integrally and continuously. Third, a deep understanding of divine truth becomes an irreplaceable foundation for applying authentic spiritual principles in daily practice. In congregational life, these spiritual values must primarily be studied and explained through the perspective of God's words. It is in this small group that church members can support one another, grow in faith, and reach out to their neighbors, friends, or co-workers. The flexible structure allows cell groups to adapt to the busy schedules of urban society. In addition, this approach facilitates a holistic spiritual transformation, from the individual to the community level. Thus, cell groups become the backbone of the urban church development strategy.

Historically, the concept of cell groups became popular through the role of Rev. David Yonggi Cho of South Korea who had a congregation of more than 850,000 people. The concept has the following meanings: first, the family as a foundation, where parents are responsible for guiding, correcting, teaching, loving, and protecting all members of the household. Second, the metaphor of growth, is described as a plant that is able to sprout and thrive in any conditions. Third, an inclusive environment that provides warmth and acceptance for every

individual. Fourth, community solidarity through caring and supporting each other in facing challenges. Fifth, a vision of transformation to bring the values of Christ to all of Korea. Sixth, the characteristics of the idealized early church: sincerity, simplicity, fidelity in service to God, and collaboration between congregations.

Member Loyalty and Responsibility

Active involvement in a group of cells creates a strong sense of ownership among members. In small groups, everyone is given space to contribute, whether as a facilitator, location provider, or person in charge of prayer. This creates a ministering mentality (Philippians 2:3-4) in which members no longer see the church as an "institution," but as a "spiritual family" that is a shared responsibility.

Active members identify themselves as an integral part of a group of cells, so their commitment is no longer based on obligation, but on a shared identity. Loyalty arises from real-life experience that their contribution is meaningful to the community. For example, a housewife who is considered "ordinary" in a large worship service feels appreciated when her cooking becomes a means of establishing relationships with non-Christian neighbors in a cell group. Conversely, this loyalty can backfire if the church fails to provide room for development for mature members. Some cases show members who are frustrated that there is no "ladder" to move up to a more strategic level of service.

Technological and Cultural Adaptation

Cell groups serve as "innovation laboratories" for urban churches to stay relevant in the digital age. By utilizing virtual platforms such as Zoom or WhatsApp groups, the cell group overcomes the challenges of high mobility and the time constraints of urban members. Hybrid meetings (face-to-face and online) allow for cross-generational participation, from millennials who are active on social media to seniors who are more comfortable at home. In addition, holding hobbies-based cell groups (sports, art) can reach more specific groups. This innovation not only expands the reach of the church, but also transforms the traditional view of "worship" into something alive, contextual, and connected to popular culture.

The flexibility of cell groups allows adaptation to local cultures, such as the use of colloquial language or discussion topics relevant to urban challenges, thereby increasing the attractiveness and engagement of new members. This is where inclusive and trained cell group leadership is important to manage multicultural dynamics and maintain the sustainability of service. However, the literature also identifies challenges such as the high mobility of urban members and resistance to church structural changes, which require periodic evaluation strategies and collaboration between cell group networks.

In this small group, discipleship occurs intensively through Bible discussion, mutual accountability, and daily practice of faith. This is in line with the Great Commission (Matthew 28:19-20) which emphasizes the teaching and application of the word. The cell group also focuses not only on the spiritual aspect, but also responds to concrete urban needs, such as: charitable services by providing assistance to migrant workers or marginalized communities,

as well as psychospiritual support (assistance for those who experience stress or loneliness). By being a "mini-church", a group of cells can be agents of change in the surrounding environment that answer the mission mandate of the church in the midst of urban complexity.

CONCLUSIONS

The important role of cell groups in the context of urban church ministry serves as a small community unit that is effective in reaching souls, as cell groups serve not only as regular meeting places, but also as a place of Bible-based discipleship. The concept of cell groups emphasizes the importance of the family, community solidarity, and a vision of transformation, all of which contribute to the development of a more dynamic church that is responsive to the needs of urban communities.

Cell groups also serve as a means to overcome the isolation often experienced by individuals in dense urban environments. The geographical flexibility allows cell groups to reach out to their members spread across multiple locations and create a strong support network. Members of the cell group who have responsibility and ownership of their community, in turn, will increase their loyalty and involvement in church ministry.

Cell groups must be able to adapt to the challenges faced by urban societies, such as social injustice and ecological crises. By integrating contextual discipleship, the cell group can answer these issues through relevant thematic discussions, so that faith becomes not only a ritual, but also a real living practice that is in line with the Great Commission that emphasizes the importance of teaching and applying God's word in daily life. Furthermore, cell groups serve as "mini-churches" that can be agents of change in the surrounding environment. Through charitable services and psychospiritual support, the cell group responds to the concrete needs of the community. Thus, cell groups focus not only on the growth of congregation numbers, but also on broader social impacts.

The study also identified challenges faced by cell groups, such as the need to provide developmental space for mature members. Member loyalty can backfire if the church does not provide a pathway for more strategic ministry growth. Therefore, it is important for churches to create an environment that supports spiritual development and ministry for all members.

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