



Rethinking Urban Mission: Reconsidering Strategic Cell Fellowships as Tools to Reach and Disciple the Unreached Sub-Saharan Urban Dwellers

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ABSTRACT

In the face of rising urbanisation, the urban church in Sub-Saharan Africa tackles the immense burden of reaching and discipling the unreached urban dwellers. Due to psychological overloads, social isolation, and social invisibility, urban residents shield themselves from casual and shallow relationships. Given the importance of true relationships in urban living, this article focuses on strategic cell fellowships as the most appropriate missional instrument for the urban church. It argues that for effective urban missions, cell fellowships strategically woven around vocational, recreational, and social networks must be explored. The article belongs to the discipline of missiology. It employs a transdisciplinary approach that incorporates the disciplines of theology, demography, sociology, psychology, and small group management, to identify practical ways to efficiently reach out to urban dwellers. This article demonstrates that God's purpose to the unreached urban dwellers in the rapidly evolving Sub-Saharan region can be fulfilled when their relational needs are intentionally met through well-structured and specialised strategic cell fellowships.

Keywords: *urban mission, strategic cell fellowship, social invisibility, psychological overloads*

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INTRODUCTION

Rapid urbanisation presents a plethora of obstacles, but it also creates incredible opportunities for all, governmental, educational, and ecclesiastical institutions. Sub-Saharan Africa, one of the world's fastest urbanising regions, is not immune to the major dynamics and traits connected with the worldwide phenomena of fast urbanisation. Various research studies have conclusively identified the major challenges facing urban dwellers as social invisibility, psychological overloads and social isolation.¹ Therefore, approaches to mission work in the urban environment, especially in the Sub-Saharan region must consider the dynamics associated with these challenges in order to tap into the opportunities they offer. Indeed, mission work in the fast-growing cities in Sub-Saharan Africa has become very challenging. This article will discuss how to use cell fellowships that are strategically

¹Emma Harries, *Social Isolation and its Relationship to the Urban Environment*, accessed 24 November 2022, <https://docplayer.net/92189976-Research-to-practice-paper-social-isolation-and-its-relationship-to-the-urban-environment.html>

tailored for urban dwellers, called strategic cell fellowships, to evangelize them, disciple them and meet their social needs.

This article seeks to highlight the crucial need to reconsider strategic cell fellowships as a major tool to reach and disciple the unreached Sub-Saharan urban dwellers. Sub-Saharan Africa is the fastest urbanizing -shifting from rural to urban- region in the world and is expected to be the fastest in human history.² This rapidly shifting mission landscape from rural to urban coupled with current health protocols restricting large gatherings presents a decisive need for the Christian worker to understand the trend and appropriate the right tools and techniques to reach out to the unreached urban Sub-Saharan urban dwellers and disciple them in Christ.

The article seeks to highlight that the Sub-Saharan urban landscape like all urban landscapes and associated challenges makes the urban dwellers suffer from psychological overloads³, social isolation,⁴ and social invisibility. Because urban life is socially mobile, with many people moving in and out of their lives, this triad of challenges forces city dwellers to protect themselves from casual and shallow relationships.

The article reflects that the basic relationships that exist in the urban setting are woven around vocational, recreational, and social networks and as such, any attempt to do an urban mission must consider the dynamics and challenges associated with relational types.

The article also seeks to establish that the aforementioned issues present opportunities for the Christian worker to reach out to the major need of urban dwellers, which is the need to love, to be loved, and build a continuous relationship which can only be achieved through cell fellowships strategically woven around the vocational, recreational and social networks that mainly exist in the urban setting.

The approach for this paper is from the transdisciplinary perspective. Transdisciplinary theologians and researchers cross the boundary of their respective disciplines to engage other disciplines on shared or transversal issues, and return to their respective disciplines after the interdisciplinary conversation, carrying with them a rich description of the issues of common interests.⁵ Given that Sub-Saharan Africa's urban life has distinct demographic and socio-cultural characteristics, an examination of social structures, human psychology, and social needs has proven effective in proposing strategic cell fellowships as the most appropriate missional tool for the urban church.

Demography of the Urbanisation of the Sub-Sahara African Region

Sub-Saharan Africa, according to the United Nations, is the geographic area of the African continent south of the Sahara.⁶ According to the United Nations, it consists of all African countries and territories located wholly or partly south of the Sahara. Sub-Saharan Africa is reported to be the fastest urbanising region relative to other continents. For Crawlings, it is not so much the reality of urbanisation that is alarming, but rather the speed. The urbanisation of Africa is expected to be the fastest in human history.⁷ Analysing City Mayors Statistics data on the world's fastest-growing cities and urban areas from 2006-2020, it provides the following analysis:

² Matthew Crawlings, "African Cities: A Case Study in Urbanization and the Rapidly Changing Missions Landscape" [posted 01/03/2017] <<https://www.imb.org/2017/03/01/african-cities-a-case-study-in-urbanization-and-the-rapidly-changing-missions-landscape/>>. Accessed July 19, 2021.

³ Veronica G. Thomas et.al, "Toward an Urban Psychology: Research, Action, and Policy", Report of American Psychological Association's (APA) Task Force on Urban Psychology (TFUP), <<https://www.apa.org/pi/ses/resources/publications/urban-taskforce.pdf>>. Accessed July 20, 2021.

⁴ Harries, "Social Isolation and its Relationship to the Urban Environment"

⁵ Gys M. Loubser, *Being Transdisciplinary Theologians in and Beyond Apocalyptic Environments*, HTS Theologiese Studies/ Theological Studies 72(4), a3473 (2016):2, accessed November 24, 2022, <http://dx.doi.org/10.4102/hts.v72i4.3473>

⁶ "Sub Saharan Africa" according to the UN statistic department on Geographic regions, <https://unstats.un.org/unsd/methodology/m49/>, Accessed September 28, 2021.

⁷ Crawlings, "African Cities: A Case Study in Urbanization and the Rapidly Changing Missions Landscape"

- In 1950, Sub-Saharan Africa had no cities with populations of more than one million. Today, it has over forty.
- The fastest-growing metropolises, such as Nairobi, Kenya, are expanding at rates of almost 4 percent per year. That is almost twice as fast as Houston, one of America's fastest-growing metropolises.
- Sub-Saharan Africa is home to two megacities (more than ten million) with three more expected to emerge by 2030.
- Eleven of the twenty-five fastest-growing cities in the world are in Sub-Saharan Africa.⁸

In an article entitled "By 2030 Africa will change from rural to urban society", Hove reports that Africa's population will cease to be predominantly rural in 2030. This is because Africa's urban population is increasing by more than three percent and that, in a decade, 40 percent of the African population will live in urban areas.⁹

Recent data collected on the fast urbanization of Africa from 2006-2020 shows Sub-Saharan African cities whose urban population increase is above three percent or near it. The data shows that among the 100 fastest-growing cities in the world, 22 are from Africa and 21 of the 22 are from Sub-Saharan Africa.¹⁰ Those 21 fast-urbanizing Sub-Saharan African cities and their percentage yearly increase are captured in the table below.

Table 1- Percentage of Urban Population Increase from 2006-2020 in Sub-Saharan Cities

S/n	Sub-Saharan African cities	Percentage Urban Population Increase from 2006-2020
1	Bamako	4.45%
2	Lagos	4.44%
3	Dar-Es-Salam	4.39%
4	Lumbubashi	4.10%
5	Kampala	4.03%
6	Luanda	3.96%
7	Kinshasa	3.89%
8	Nairobi	3.87%
9	Antananarivo	3.73%
10	Conakry	3.61%
11	Maputo	3.54%
12	Mogadishu	3.52%
13	Addis Ababa	3.40%
14	Brazzaville	3.29%
15	Dakar	3.06%
16	Accra	2.93%
17	East Rand	2.89%
18	Yaoundé	2.80%
19	Douala	2.71%
20	Abidjan	2.49%
21	Khartoum	2.41%

⁸ Tann vom Hove, *By 2030 Africa will change from rural to urban society*, Accessed September 13th, 2021, <http://www.citymayors.com/society/urban_africa.html>

⁹ Hove, *By 2030 Africa will change from rural to urban society*

¹⁰ CityMayors Statistics, "*The world's fastest-growing cities and urban areas from 2006 to 2020-Urban areas ranked 1 to 100*", <http://www.citymayors.com/statistics/urban_growth1.html> Accessed September 13th, 2021

Social Challenges and Urbanization of the Sub-Sahara Region

According to Hove, the majority of urban people in Sub-Saharan Africa are forced to live in slums and shanties that lack proper sanitation, water, transportation, and health care.¹¹ In addition to infrastructural issues and a lack of basic facilities, the majority of Sub-Saharan Africans suffer from

- Social invisibility
- Psychological overloads and
- Social isolation

Social Invisibility

Social invisibility is one of the major challenges that urban dwellers face that presents a great opportunity for urban missiologists. The growing urban cities in Africa are characterized by the high cost of living because of the high cost of transport, accommodation, water, electricity, school fees, feeding, and the list is unending. So most urban dwellers shy away from relationships that have no economic advantages. These economic challenges have generated many social vices and a high sense of insecurity. In the cities in Africa, this insecurity has resulted in all kinds of security systems, fences, and psychological filters. This pushes the majority of urban dwellers to shut others out of their lives. People live in the same apartment buildings, and estates and they may never know each other. This results in social invisibility and anonymity where urban dwellers live in isolation, unaware of or unconcerned about their neighbours.

Bakke puts it this way: "People do not open doors, do not know neighbors, and often do not list or answer phones...That surely is a challenge to evangelistic strategy and new church development."¹²

Since the Church exists to fulfil Jesus's command to make disciples of all nations (i.e. "ethnos" or group of people) according to Matthew 28:19, the dynamics, the challenges, and the opportunities associated with the *Urban Social Invisibility* must be considered to fashion the best method of mission and evangelization.

The writer submits that the fact that urban dwellers shy away from casual relationships is proof that humans need to love, to be loved in some continuous relationships. Urban dwellers want and hunger for fellowship, which is of high quality and lasting. This has further led to the creation and growth of various social networks and clubs.

This thirst for fellowship and communion renders public evangelism, open-air preaching, and invitations to Church programs not appropriate for fast-growing urban regions such as Sub-Saharan African cities. The writer submits that one of the best evangelistic methods that can solve the urban dwellers' need for continuing relationships and also present the most adequate environment for fellowship and discipleship is the "strategic evangelism" and "strategic cells". Because the designation "home cells" may not be appropriate, the writer created the terminology "strategic cells". After all, most city people merely go home to sleep, but "strategic cells" or "strategic evangelism" in their new "homes", which are their economic convergence points, and/or the social networks to which they belong, could be the most effective weapon for breaking down the social invisibility barrier.

When the writer was on the mission field in Brazzaville (Congo), he noticed that some craftsmen on a particular building project could only be reached out to during their lunch break, he began a strategic fellowship with them right on the project site for Bible study. That was the only way to reach out to the socially "invisible" urban dwellers in a more acceptable manner.

Psychological overloads

Psychological overloads consist of activities, noises, and urban stimuli that compete for one's attention, such as a barrage of commercial messages and a variety of casual relationships with little or no human

¹¹ Hove, *By 2030 Africa will change from rural to urban society*.

¹² Raymond J. Bakke, "Evangelization of the World's Cities, in *An Urban World: Churches Face the Future*", ed. Larry L. Rose and C. Kirk Hadaway (Nashville, TN: Broadman Press, 1984), 81-82.

touch. As a result of these overloads, most urban dwellers tend to develop mental filters that allow them to select what they accept while rejecting others. They move in and out of areas and relationships regularly. Bakke expressed it this way:

Fundamentally, rural life is generalized and urban life is specialized. . . . In rural areas, we know everybody. . . . The city changes all that. We cannot possibly invest emotionally in a million personal relationships. In the city, we choose our relationships and save our emotions for special causes. We do not talk in elevators because intuitively we know it would invade our neighbors' space. The closer people live to us in cities, the less we communicate because of the psychological principle of overload.¹³

This explains why door-to-door evangelism is so ineffective. People are fed up with superficial relationships that they believe provide no personal value. Their ability to avoid or refuse additional communication is sometimes even crucial to their existence. As a result, city dwellers are often antagonistic to newcomers, particularly if they believe that there is an attempt to convert them to a certain way of life. This mental filtering and hostile attitude to all external calls, including the call to salvation, informs the missional urban church to adopt a more holistic approach to reaching the urban community. According to Darku, an urban missiologist, the church whose mandate is both evangelistic and cultural must seek the welfare of its community.¹⁴ This makes the call for household evangelism and household fellowship (commonly referred to as home cells) for city dwellers with homes, as well as strategic cells for city dwellers who can only be found in places of economic activity or social network groups, one of the most important methods to revisit.

Green corroborates this truth and asserts that one of the most important methods of spreading the gospel in antiquity was the use of homes. For him these methods presented the following advantages:

- The possibility of a real interchange of views is because of the small numbers involved.
- The possibility of informed discussion among the participants.
- Absence of artificial isolation of a preacher from his hearers.

He further observed that the sheer informality and relaxed atmosphere of the home, not to mention the hospitality which must often have gone with it, all helped to make this form of evangelism particularly successful.¹⁵

Because of the antagonism to external calls and the mental filters that urban residents have adopted as a result of psychological overloads, strategies such as strategic cell fellowship for holistic missions are needed to effectively reach out to Sub-Saharan African urban inhabitants.

Social Isolation

Another issue that urban dwellers face is social isolation. It's vital to understand the kind of interactions that exist in the rural context to comprehend why urban inhabitants feel socially separated. In rural settings, there are commonly two types of relationships: biological and geographical. The biological relationship refers to the bonds that exist between members of one's family and relatives. A geographical relationship is one in which there is a connection between two persons due to their sharing of a similar geographical environment. These two sorts of relationships bind rural folks together.

The situation in the urban setting, on the other hand, is rather different. There are three types of interactions in urban contexts, such as those found in Sub-Saharan Africa's fast-growing cities: vocational, recreational, and social networks. In the city, vocational relationships are prevalent. It's about the bonds formed with colleagues at work. Recreational relationships, which are interactions with those with whom people play or spend leisure time with, bind urban dwellers. The third sort of relationship with urban dwellers is social networks, which are ties formed as a result of membership in one or more social networks and by the increasing use of internet-related social platforms.

¹³ Bakke, "Evangelization of the World's Cities, in *An Urban World: Churches Face the Future*", 81.

¹⁴ Nii Amoo Darku, "Holistic City Evangelism: Accra Perspective", (Eshcolit Ghana Ltd, 2005), px-xi.

¹⁵ Michael Green, "Evangelism in the Early Church", (Eastbourne: Kingsway Communication Ltd, 2003), 318.

People rarely relate in an urban area unless they share the same vocation or job, share common leisure, or belong to the same social networks. As a result, people living in urban areas are becoming socially isolated. And whether people are working or not, whether they are socially connected to a network or not, determines what kind of relationship they belong to and where they can be found.

This prevalent trend in the urban setting must instruct the missional church on how to more effectively reach out to socially isolated persons. This societal need and desire for belonging can only be satisfied through a well-knit strategic cell fellowship that will give urban people the confidence to belong to and allow themselves to be evangelised and discipled. The street proclamation of the gospel, house-to-house evangelism and evangelistic tract sharing have all proven no more to be effective tools of evangelisation.

The Concept of Strategic Cell Fellowship as Missionary unit of the Urban Missional Church

A “strategic cell fellowship” is primarily an evangelistic Bible study group comprised of an intentional mix both of believers and unbelievers that share the same social network, and vocational or recreational relationship in an urban setting. A strategic cell fellowship is a strategic tool because:

1. The primary objective of a strategic cell fellowship concept has its theological grounds in the great commission mandate verse of Mathew 28:19 to “make disciples of all *ethnē*” *μαθητεύσατε πάντα τὰ ἔθνη* (*matheteusate panta ta ethnē*). Scholarship has agreed on the exegetical meaning *ethnē* (people groups) with its singular *ethnos* (people group). Winter and Koch define a people group from the exegesis of the word *ethnos* as follows:
“A people group is a significantly large grouping of individuals who perceive themselves to have a common affinity for one another because of their shared language, religion, ethnicity, residence, occupation, class or caste, situation, etc., or combinations of these. For evangelistic purposes, it is the largest group within which the gospel can spread as a Church Planting Movement without encountering barriers of understanding or acceptance”.¹⁶
The landscape of the urban area is littered with different sorts of people groups as earlier demonstrated who share the same social, vocational, and recreational interests. The urban missional church must adopt new methodologies to reach out to the unreached Sub-Saharan urban dwellers through the foundational concept of the strategic cell.
2. The strategic cell fellowship is strategic because it intends to lead people to faith in the Lord Jesus Christ and also build on-mission believers by engaging them in twelve foundational growth factors that provide a person with qualitative Christian growth. Wagner developed a list of factors that may be accepted interdenominationally and internationally to measure the qualitative growth of congregants which are Bible knowledge, personal devotions, worship, witnessing, lay ministry, missions, giving, fellowship, distinctive lifestyle, attitude toward religion, social service and social justice were the twelve factors of his findings. Those factors, as they relate to the growth of the strategic cell fellowship, are elucidated as follows:¹⁷
 - i. **Bible knowledge:** For the missional church in the Sub-Saharan African continent to reach effectively and disciple urban dwellers Bible knowledge is an index to consider. The strategic cell fellowship is also a Bible study unit with an evangelistic and discipleship purpose in an atmosphere of compassion, fellowship and relationship building.
 - ii. **Personal devotion:** For the urban mission to succeed in raising healthy disciples, there is the need to emphasize personal devotions in addition to corporate devotions. Corporate devotions and fellowship help build interpersonal relationships that the urban socially invisible individuals yearn for. But in addition to that, personal devotions must be encouraged as they help in building a personal relationship with God. The strategic cell will act as the platform for spiritual accountability for personal encounters and relationship statuses with the Lord.

¹⁶ Ralph D. Winter and Bruce Koch. "Finishing the Task: The Unreached Peoples Challenge." In Perspectives on the World Christian Movement, 4th Ed. (Pasadena, CA: William Carey Library, 2009), 536.

¹⁷ Peter C. Wagner, "Leading Your Church To Growth: The Secret of Pastor/People Partnership in Dynamic Church Growth" (Ventura: Regal books, 1984), 25-26.

- iii. **Worship:** The strategic cell in the urban setting will provide a conducive environment not only for Bible study but also for worship, and singing of hymns and prayers, thus bringing the presence of God to the physical, virtual and vocational habitats of the urban dweller.
- iv. **Witnessing:** One of the responsibilities the strategic cells will be tasked with by the leadership of the urban missional church is to lead the members of the cell at a certain maturity stage to share their faith and their testimonies of salvation and transformed lives with their friends in their social network and invite the same for fellowship.
- v. **Lay ministry:** The strategic cell concept once adopted by the missional church will lead to the unleashing of the lay ministry in the local assembly and the development of responsible leaders in the cell.
- vi. **Missions:** For the missional church in the vast growing urban setting to succeed, the determination and attitude towards the inner city mission must be formalised. Since there is an established growing number of people in the urban setting with heterogenous backgrounds, the support, organisation and sustenance of the inner mission must become a matter of policy with a statutory body in the church being put in charge.
- vii. **Giving:** The strategic cell is a platform that will eventually create an avenue for parishioners and cell members to express themselves by giving their resources to missions. Reference to John 20:21 “As the Father hath sent Me, even so send I you” shows that one of the bases of missions is participation. Mission is woven around God's giving of Himself through His Son and the Holy Spirit. The strategic cell fellowship will create opportunities for cell members to give of themselves and resources willingly to the cause of mission.
- viii. **Fellowship:** Fellowship occupies a significant part where members grow in their personal relationships with each other through regular participation in church fellowship groups of one kind or another. For fellowship to happen, there must be small groups. And this is made possible through the strategic cells.
- ix. **Distinctive lifestyle:** One of the objectives the strategic cell will be charged with is to monitor and ensure that each member of the cell community is encouraged and motivated to live a distinctive lifestyle in an urban area noted for its multiplicity of vices.
- x. **Attitude toward religion:** In an urban setting, dwellers are daily confronted with pressing social and especially economic needs. There is, therefore, the temptation to build a need-based relationship with God as a respite or a solution to numerous life crises and incessant urban challenges. A closely knit group like a strategic cell fellowship made of few persons who share similar social, vocational and recreational interests is a perfect environment for a proper attitude toward religion primarily as a service to God than a means to solve life crises.
- xi. **Social service:** One activity that can help the socially anonymous and invisible urban dwellers to break the psychological filters and social fences around themselves is being involved in social outreach organised at the strategic cell level and targeted at reaching the needy, the poor and other marginalised in the city. Such social outreaches could act as open doors to the discovery of other unreached people groups, serve as evangelistic catalysts and paint a more human face for the missional church.
- xii. **Social justice:** The Sub-Saharan urban landscape is like all other urban landscapes where demographics are challenged with serious issues of social injustice such as corruption, marginalization of social misfits, lack of employment, and lack of social amenities. One of such tools that can act as a social thermometer and begin engaging the community in providing first aid and providing appropriate solutions to the injustice in the urban varied substratum and heterogenous social layers, is the strategic cell fellowship.

Basic structures to be adopted by the Missional Church to sustain missions in the urban setting and the strategic cells.

For the strategic cell concept to realize the intended objectives to reach and disciple the unreached Sub-Saharan urban dwellers commensurate leadership and training structures must be in place. Wagner remarked that a personal review undertaken on Church growth literature and missions produced over a decade and a half did not provide any discourse on the impact of leadership on growth.¹⁸ He, therefore, argues for “a proper combination of a strong pastoral leadership and an intelligent followership,”¹⁹ to achieve sound growth in missions. To emphasize the need for structural growth to match quantitative and qualitative growth, Gene Mims underscores the biblical and theological roots of structure in that “Paul preached but others baptized (1 Cori 1:17)”, and for there to be sustainable growth there must be ministry structures and teams that allow “some to plant and others water (1 Cori 3:7-9).”²⁰ Mims identifies 10 basic structures he terms “short-term tracks or events” a church should have to uphold “intentionally” for the making of disciples, the maturing of believers and the multiplying of closed group ministries. These are the leadership training track, the evangelism training track, the ministry equipping track, the age-group ministries track, the music development track, the women enrichment track, the men ministry track, the mission education track, the special interest track and the special needs track.

1. **Leadership training track.** One of the most important basic structures to equip urban church members are groups intentionally organized to train the lay leadership in the church for volunteer leadership positions in open groups, closed groups, corporate worship, committees, cells and so forth.
2. **Evangelism training track.** For the growth of the urban church to be an ongoing affair it must run on the backbone of an evangelism training track where groups are intentionally organized to train open group leaders and participants in evangelism and to engage the participants in ongoing evangelistic experiences.
3. **Ministry equipping track.** One of the structures in the urban church that sustains church growth is when some groups are intentionally organized for a short-term period for training people for a specific ministry experience or assignment. For example that would include training youth to conduct a mission vacation Bible school, training parents to serve as counsellors on a mission trip, and training adults who have volunteered for medical missions assignments.
4. **Age-group ministry track.** Churches in an urban setting that would witness growth at all levels of the age echelons are churches that have groups intentionally organized for age-group learners including preschoolers, children, youth, collegiate, young adults, singles, seniors, and other adults.
5. **Music development track.** Music is identified as a very important tool that sustains mission growth and any church that envisions viable growth must have groups that are intentionally organized for age-group learners for training in music development including preschoolers, children, youth, young adults, and adult choirs and related instrumental groups.
6. **Women enrichment track.** Women's enrichment and empowerment tracks are necessary tools to back mission and church growth. There must be groups that are intentionally organized for women to equip women to enrich the lives of other women and their families for Christ, to enable women to discover their God-given gifts for ministry, to search out the needs in their churches and communities and match those needs with their gifts of service, to lead women to accept Christ as Lord, to become women of deeper prayer, and to become women who study the Bible and base their entire lives on the Word of God.
7. **Men ministry track.** Just like in the case with women, there must be men's ministry structures where groups are intentionally organized for men to discover how they are uniquely called and

¹⁸ Wagner, “*Leading Your Church To Growth: The Secret of Pastor/People Partnership in Dynamic Church Growth*”, 10.

¹⁹ Wagner, “*Leading Your Church To Growth: The Secret of Pastor/People Partnership in Dynamic Church Growth*”, 10.

²⁰ Gene Mims., “*Kingdom Principles For Church Growth*” (Nashville: LifeWay Christian Resources, 2008), 119.

shaped by God to live the Great Commandment and to equip men to fulfill the Great Commission in every aspect of their lives, personal, home, church, workplace, community, and the world.

8. **Missions Education track.** Urban churches that would grow are missions minded and have mission orientation and education tracks made of groups that are intentionally organized for age-group learners for training in mission education and mission experiences including preschoolers, children, youth, young adults, and adults.
9. **Special interests track.** Sustained church growth in the urban mission field must meet certain special interests. For that purpose, there must be groups that are intentionally organized based on learners' interests such as marriage enrichment, parenting skills, family issues, or prayer.
10. **Special needs track.** There is a need to focus on special needs that come as a result of life crises for healthy church growth. To achieve this, there must be groups that are intentionally organized based on specific affinity and personal needs such as divorce recovery and health.

The Urban Missional Church Actions

The term *missional* refers to the essential nature and vocation of the Church as God's called and sent people. For the urban church to succeed in urban missions or inner city missions and use the architecture of the strategic cell productively and efficiently, it must recapture its missional nature by being contextual, intentional, proclaiming, reconciling, sanctifying, unifying, and transforming. These seven indices of the missional church as described by Van Engen and Guder are as follows:

1. *Contextual:* A missional church understands itself as part of a larger context of a lost and broken world so loved by God
2. *Intentional:* A missional church understands itself as existing for "following Christ in mission."
3. *Proclaiming.* A missional church understands itself as intentionally sent by God on a mission to announce in word and deed the coming kingdom of God in Christ.
4. *Reconciling.* A missional church understands itself to be a reconciling and healing presence in its contexts, locally and globally.
5. *Sanctifying.* A missional church understands itself as a faith community gathered around the Word preached, thus personally living out its truth and serving as a purifying influence to society.
6. *Unifying.* A missional church understands itself as an embracing, enfolding, gathering community of faith, anxious to receive persons in fellowship.
7. *Transforming.* A missional church is "the salt of the earth" (Matt.5:13), a transforming presence as the body of Christ in mission, called to be, embody, and live out in the world following biblical concepts of mission, among others: *koinōnia*, *kērygma*, *diakonia*, *martyria*, prophet, priest, king, liberator, healer, sage.²¹

Categories of Evangelism to help reach out to the unreached urban dwellers

Because of the heterogeneous nature of individuals and the variety of social settings in the urban landscape, different categories of evangelism must be adopted by the missional church to first effectively evangelize the unreached urban dwellers before grouping them in types of strategic cell fellowship that is appropriate to their social interests and affiliation. Foli observes that for a church to be effective in witnessing four categories of evangelism must be practiced.²² These four categories of evangelism are: evangelism to win nominal Christians back to faith, evangelism beyond the "stained-glass barrier, Intra-cultural evangelism and cross-cultural evangelism, and they are all relevant to the urban setting.

1. Evangelism to win nominal Christians back to the faith.

According to Foli, this type of evangelism seeks to win nominal Christians back to their faith in the Lord and into a renewed commitment to the Christian walk. This type of evangelism though

²¹ C.Van Engen, "God's Missionary people" (Grand Rapids:Baker 1991,) 65-70;Darell Guder, "Missional Church: A Vision for the Sending of the Church in North America" (Grand Rapids :Eerdmans 1998), 254-64.

²² Richard Foli., "Towards Church Growth in Ghana" (Accra: Trust Publishers, 1996), 54-55.

has numerical benefit to the church is primarily targeted at the qualitative or internal growth of the nominal Christian.²³ Many individuals when they move from the rural area to the urban area lose their bearings and remain out of worship and Christian fellowship for a certain season. This type of evangelism organised by the mother church or by the home cells or strategic cells can help bring back to the fold the nominal believer who could get the confidence to locate a place of fellowship on their own in the city.

2. **Evangelism beyond the “Stained-Glass Barrier”.**

Foli observes that churches that envision winning more souls must go beyond the “stained-glass barrier” of the church into the community around the church. Winter opines that this kind of evangelism taking place amongst people who share similar linguistics, socio-economic realities and social heritage, would result in a harvest of people who would quickly feel at home and find the pattern of worship quite congenial.²⁴ This type of evangelism can easily lead to the establishment of strategic cell fellowships that consist of individuals with similar linguistics, socio-economic realities and social heritage.

3. **Intra-Cultural Evangelism**

Foli claims church growth results when evangelism is culturally biased. According to him, this kind of evangelism focuses on reaching out to people of similar cultures and would eventually lead to the formation of separate congregations, home cells, or strategic cells that will act as bases for effective outreach to people of the same culture.²⁵

4. **Cross-Cultural Evangelism**

Foli underscores cross-cultural evangelism as a fourth type of evangelism, which, unlike intra-cultural evangelism, seeks to cross barriers and plant a church amongst people of a different culture.²⁶

Line management and administration of the strategic cell fellowship system

For effective line management, growth monitoring, meeting statistics, reporting structure and administration of the strategic cell system, there is a system whose efficiency has been tested by the writer.²⁷

For the strategic cell fellowship concept to work, the leadership of the church from the national level through the local church must be trained and involved in the realization of the vision.

The Jethro concept (Exodus 18:19-22) can be used to organise the administration of the strategic cell fellowship, as seen in the organogram below. In the organogram, the fifth level of leadership is called “the cell nucleus”. The cell nucleus is made up of the cell leaders with his three disciples. Until they have formed a fully fledged strategic cell fellowship of 10 to 12 members, the cell leaders meet with their disciples and reach out to others who share their social, recreational, and professional needs. There is a zonal leadership that oversees five cell groups, each of which consists of an average of 50 to 60 people, a district leadership that oversees 2 zones and an area leadership that coordinates the administration of two districts, as the cell groups multiply. A local church directorate of the strategic cell fellowship under the direct supervision of the urban church clergy is required for accountability, drive, and flow of pastoral care, as well as the establishment of national leadership for the coordination of the strategic cell system of all the nation's urban areas.

²³ Foli., “Towards Church Growth in Ghana”, 54.

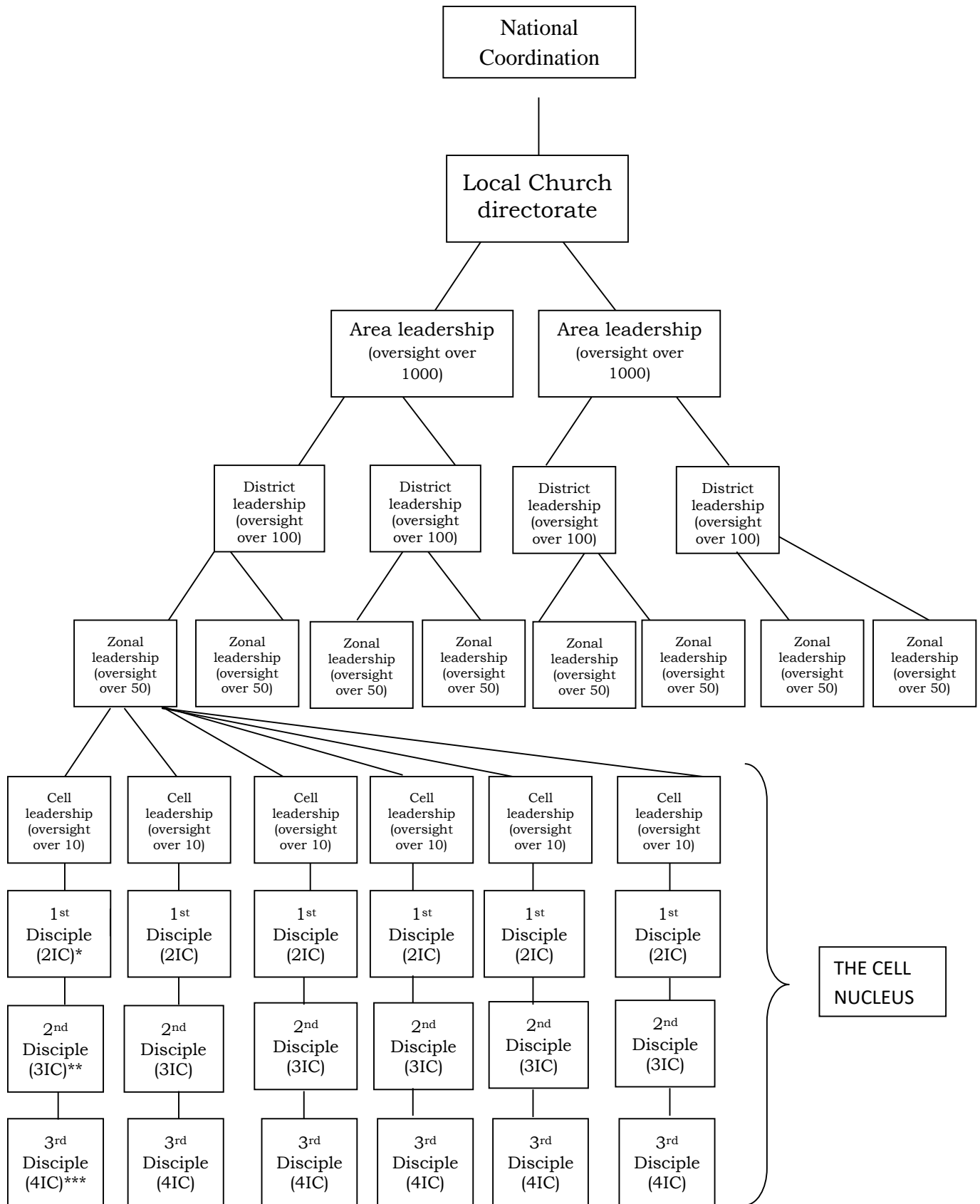
²⁴ Foli., “Towards Church Growth in Ghana”, 55.

²⁵ Foli., “Towards Church Growth in Ghana”, 55.

²⁶ Foli., “Towards Church Growth in Ghana”, 55.

²⁷ Eric J. Abrahams-Appiah., “The Ark Strategy Booklet: The King’s Strategic Fellowship Center Details”, (The King’s Generals International Church Strategic fellowship records booklet), Unpublished, July 17, 2021.

Fig 1. Organogram of Strategic Fellowships



*2IC: 2nd in command, **3IC: 3rd in command. ***4IC: 4th in command

Cho who used the same strategy to build one of the biggest churches worldwide has this to say:

There is only one way that the home cell group system will be successful in a church if that system is to be used as a tool of evangelism. The pastor must be the key person involved. Without the pastor, the system will not hold together. It is a system, and a system must have a control point. The control factor in home cell groups is the pastor.²⁸

Rapid urbanisation in Sub-Saharan Africa brings numerous challenges, but it also creates tremendous opportunities for urban churches. The urban churches' leadership should use the opportunities and challenges that come with urbanisation to rethink how best to achieve urban missions by developing competency in both the clergy and the laity on reaching out to unreached urban dwellers through strategically tailored cell fellowships.

CONCLUSION

This paper has discussed the role that strategic cell fellowship can play in effective missions to the unreached Sub-Saharan urban dwellers. It proved that Sub-Saharan Africa was one of the fastest urbanizing regions in the world and the fastest in human history. It pointed out that the Sub-Saharan urban landscape was characterized by psychological overloads, social isolation and social invisibility. It has proposed that in light of the challenges associated with the fast-growing urban settings of Sub-Saharan Africa, strategic cell fellowship as a tool to reach and disciple the unreached Sub-Saharan urban area should be considered as Christian leaders are rethinking urban missions. This paper began with the demographic data on the Sub-Saharan Urban landscape, followed by the description of the major challenges that urban dwellers traverse, and the description of the strategic cell fellowship as a foundational and practical tool that can be used by the urban missional church.

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²⁸ David Yonggi Cho., *Successful Home Cell Groups*, (Florida: Bridge-Logos 1981), 103.

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