

# **The Cell Church Model in New Zealand Baptist Churches**

## **Abstract**

The Cell Church model was discussed widely in New Zealand Baptist Churches during the 1990's. The concept of small groups being like cells and constituting the church radically changes the structure of church. It fulfils needs based on relationships and community, with the opportunity to empower and release people for ministry. Cells are highly evangelistic in focus. A number of churches embarked on this by establishing cells, but with dramatically different outcomes. Three case studies are considered; a church which has successfully established as a cell church, one which modified its approach to small groups, and one where the attempt was unsuccessful. Church can effectively function with the cell/small group as the main focus, and an effective Cell Church model can be implemented. To do so requires vision by the entire leadership and effective communication that it is a way of being church, not just a strategy for evangelism of church growth.

## **Introduction**

The Cell Church model was discussed widely within New Zealand Baptist churches during the 1990's. A number of churches embarked on this by establishing cells within the life of the church. Many though seemed to be short lived. Lack of conversions among unbelievers, as clearly evidenced in overseas Cell Churches resulted in disappointment, and the perceived failure of this model for the New Zealand culture. This paper investigates the Cell Church model proposed by Ralph Neighbour, as implemented in the Faith Community Baptist Church in Singapore, which was promoted in New Zealand. An overview of the model is provided, with a review of the New Zealand experience in the early 1990's. Three case

studies reflect the varying degree of effectiveness which Cells have been implemented.

### **Church or Cell Church?**

Our theology of church has been influenced by a number of factors, including: experience - determined by culture; structure – determined by social systems and tradition – determined by history.<sup>1</sup> One of the strongest influences today comes from a theology of mission, that it is from mission that the church has to be understood. The implication is that every person has gifts, and the whole congregation belongs to, and is committed to, the mission of God's kingdom.<sup>2</sup> Metaphors of the church are all relationally based, including:<sup>3</sup>

- Nation of God, a royal priesthood (I Peter 2:9)
- Body of Christ, where unity comes out of diversity (Ephesians 1:22-23)
- Temple of the Spirit, calling us to holy living (I Corinthians 3:16-17)

According to Ralph Neighbour, 'there is a population explosion happening in the non-Christian world, and our evangelism must take new forms and shapes if it is to keep up with the needs of today'.<sup>4</sup> The answer, according to his Cell Church model, lies in rejecting tradition and revisiting the New Testament model.

1 J. Moltmann, *The Church in the Power of the Spirit* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993), 4.

2 Moltmann 7-10.

3 S.J. Grenz, *Theology for the Community of God* (Carlisle: The Paternoster Press, 1994), 607-608.

4 R.W. Neighbour, *Where Do We Go From Here?* (Houston: Touch Publications, 1990), 13.

The cell church is God's design to make His church capable of equipping and mobilising every member for the work of the ministry. The cell church provides the structure by which "the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work" (Ephesians 4:16).<sup>5</sup>

This is consistent with the mandate of the church to glorify God, through the ministry of witness, fellowship, service and worship.<sup>6</sup> Ralph Neighbour continually links aspects of community and cell life, although with qualifications for his model.

Essential elements of community include interpersonal commitments and a sense of belonging. Community takes place when there is a shared life allowing common goals and commitments to develop between all of its members.<sup>7</sup> 'The Cell Group Church is a New Testament form of church life, each cell, of up to 15 people, becoming a true community, and extended family unit for Christians.'<sup>8</sup> 'Cells are the basic building block of church life,<sup>9</sup> as a large group can't provide the essential ingredients required for community'.<sup>10</sup>

### **Overview of Ralph Neighbour's Cell Church Model**

The primary activities of cells, in a cell church, are edification – the building up of one another, and evangelism. In a typical meeting there are four distinct aspects; welcome,

5 L. Khong, *The Apostolic Cell Church*. (Singapore: Touch Publications Int. Pte Ltd, 2000), 31.

6 Grenz 637-638.

7 Neighbour, *Where Do We Go From Here?*, 94.

8 R.W. Neighbour, *The Shepherds Guide Book* (Houston: Touch Publications, 1988), 6.

9 Neighbour, *The Shepherds Guide Book*, 1.

10 Neighbour, *Where Do We Go From Here?*, 95.

worship, word and works, which build upon the teaching received from the Celebration meeting.<sup>11</sup>

Cells are for developing relationships and sharing experiences, applying teaching, intermingled with the flow of the *charismata* (the 'grace gifts' of I Corinthians 12, 14; Romans 12:6-8.), provided by Christ for us to build up one another.<sup>12</sup> With the second purpose of evangelism, cells engage in much prayer for those friends and acquaintances that don't yet have a personal relationship with Jesus. Every person is accountable to the cell for living out an evangelistic lifestyle. Rather than the traditional evangelism method of one-on-one, where a believer shares the gospel with an unbeliever, in cells evangelism happens as part of community. The cell demonstrates the reality of the gospel message in a tangible way to unbelievers. The cell simply includes unbelievers as part of the family, even before he or she makes a commitment to Christ.<sup>13</sup> Cell meetings are conducted in such ways that any unbelievers who may be invited to attend feel at home.<sup>14</sup>

The concept of small groups being like cells and constituting the church radically changes the structure of church. The name 'cell' reflects that each group is a dynamic, living organism. As the human body only grows and functions if cells continue to grow and multiply, church growth is reliant upon the growth and vitality of 'cells'.

We can summarise the essence of cell church as:

The cell is seen as fully church

Outreach is principally from a welcoming cell

11 O.S. Geok, *Cell Leaders Handbook* (Singapore: Faith Community Baptist Church, 1994), 15, 20.

12 Neighbour, *Where Do We Go From Here?*, 68.

13 Khong 121.

14 Khong 46.

Ministry of the church happens through the cells rather than in programs at the congregational level.

Cells aim to multiply

Community is extremely important<sup>15</sup>

This does not mean there is no Sunday service. Rather, Sunday is the overflow of the cell life, a time of celebration, and to a visitor will not seem that different from many other services.<sup>16</sup> A difference in terminology is that traditional churches have a 'congregational' gathering on Sunday, supported by small groups during the week. Cell Church has cells, supported by the larger Sunday gathering for celebration. In between these may be smaller gatherings, called congregations, which meet, for special purposes, such as evangelistic events, community groups or for worship.<sup>17</sup>

While this philosophy has been attempted in quite a number of traditional churches they seem to have been task oriented, i.e. specifically meeting for an evangelistic study, or for in-depth Bible Study, but not both. Or, they may meet for a 'deep and meaningful' share time, but as a closed group where people come to be ministered to.<sup>18</sup>

It seems traditional churches have a number of significant issues to confront in trying to make a transition to a Cell Church.<sup>19</sup>

They must have a commitment to a clear vision and strategy for growth, through bringing unbelievers into the cell, which is one of the prime reasons for the cell existence.

There must be reliance on the supernatural work of the Holy Spirit [although this should be true of any group in any church].

15 B. Hopkins, *Cell Church Stories as Signs of Mission*. (Cambridge: Grove Books Limited, 2000), 3-4.

16 Hopkins 4.

17 Neighbour, *The Shepherd's Guide Book*, 9.

18 Neighbour, *Where Do We Go From Here?*, 59-67.

19 Khong 32-34.

A strong and God-appointed leader is required, who is committed to the vision of reaching and ministering to people through the means of cells.

A further emphasis by Ralph Neighbour is that all members need to accept their responsibility, to be ministering people themselves, as body ministry primarily happens in the cell, by cell members, rather than on Sunday by the pastor or ministry team.<sup>20</sup>

One of the significant weaknesses, though, of Ralph Neighbour's model is the strong inference that cell church equates to the New Testament way of being church, therefore implying other models are unbiblical. This is clearly a contentious issue, and has perhaps contributed to resistance to pursue this model. It also, through placing a limit on the size of groups, implies that larger groups can not be based around close caring relationships. The key elements of cell church are primarily community and evangelism, which doesn't necessarily make it different in ethos from some traditional churches. The essential difference is the primary reason for the existence of a cell church, being evangelism by cells supported by the larger gatherings. It was with the desire to be more evangelistic in focus, with the expected growth subsequently, that attracted the attention of some N.Z. Baptist churches.

### **The New Zealand Experience in the Early 1990's**

By the end of the 1960's the New Zealand culture was heading away from church, the evangelistic crusades having reached the last of the 'gospelised secular Kiwis', and although the charismatic renewal of the 1970's brought some change, with

20 Neighbour, *Where Do We Go From Here?*, 91.

the ethos of people coming to church, it failed to connect with the wider secular community.<sup>21</sup>

Other opinions suggest that the early 1990's saw the tail end of the charismatic movement within Baptist churches, and with it concern for the lack of growth resulting from 'renewal'.<sup>22</sup> Sunday morning worship was seen as the primary focus of church life, the quality and style of preaching and worship determining growth or decline; there was no evangelistic effort; the back door was open with inadequate means of retaining people.<sup>23</sup> During this period, the Baptist churches of New Zealand pursued an evangelistic growth target of 300 churches, with 40,000 members, by the year 2000. Launched in 1985 there was a strategic focus on church planting, and a significant number of new churches were planted during the early 1990's.<sup>24</sup>

During the previous 20 years, the commitment to small groups had grown significantly across all denominations, with slight increases among Baptists.<sup>25</sup> Among those with no church background, friendship was the primary influence in them deciding to become Christian, being almost twice as influential

21 Ian Brown, interview 11 August 2000. Ian was the Executive Secretary of The Baptist Union of New Zealand, 1991- 2000.

22 Ian Brown, 11 August, 2000.

23 W. McKenzie, 'Do we need More or Different Churches?' *NZB*, Sept 1993, 9.

24 D. Marriot, 'Home Mission Board Report' in *Baptist Union and Missionary Society of New Zealand, Year Book 1985-1986*, 47; B.K. Smith, 'Assembly Embraces Ambitious Church Growth Goals', *NZB* 1985 Vol 10(11) 7.

25 P. Lineham, 'The Condition of the Church' in B. Patrick (ed.), *New Vision New Zealand* (Auckland: Academy Interprint Ltd, 1993), 97-120. Census figures show an increase from 7-11% in 1971 to 9-14% in 1991, as a percentage of the total population.

as any other person or factor.<sup>26</sup> After friendship, small groups were the most effective way of reaching people for Christ, slightly ahead of church services and evangelistic messages.<sup>27</sup> However, the House Church and Home Group Movements, which were small group focused, tended to burn out leaders, who were expected to be spiritual leaders and biblical teachers; groups were closed, with no expectation for growth, and too much was expected of leaders in terms of time commitment.<sup>28</sup>

The Cell Church concept seemed to solve the problem of how to 'earth' evangelism into society.<sup>29</sup> People could belong to intimate groups, and experience a sense of belonging and acceptance, in contrast with so much of the anonymity of society,<sup>30</sup> based on the fact that God has shaped us for community, with people meeting together heart to heart to be equipped for all that they are meant to be.<sup>31</sup>

The journey from a traditional church into cell church life requires major philosophical changes.<sup>32</sup> The cell becomes the

26 R. Muller, 'Who responds to the Gospel?' in *New Vision New Zealand*, 197-216. As both a means for sharing faith and for seeing the new convert become a mature disciple in the fellowship of the local church, friendship and personal relationships are paramount. At the same time, the influence of non-church, para-church and crusades have significantly declined. Friends and Family Members are influential in about 43% of responses. In a survey of 130 churches in 1992, 10,000 responses were received. From these 2715 were considered, as they had made decisions in the periods of 1980-86 and 1987-92, the periods compared.

27 R. Muller, 'How Are Churches Doing Evangelism?' in *New Vision New Zealand*, 217-233.

28 B. Winslade, interview 6 September, 2000.

29 Ian Brown, 11 August 2000.

30 I. Brown, 'Relevant Churches: To Explore New Frontiers', *NZB*, Sept 1993, 6.

31 M. Cottle, 'The Cell Church Explained', *NZB*, April 1994, 2.

32 P. Grimmer, 'Learning from Other's Mistakes', *NZB*, April 1994, 3.



primary focus not the worship service, and the mission is, *'reaching unbelievers and equipping Christians for that task'*<sup>33</sup> Small groups should be intentional in evangelism, supporting each other so there is no burden on individuals, and group activities designed so unbelievers can be invited.<sup>34</sup> Pastoral care happens within the group, lightening the load of the leadership, although caring for the cell group leaders has to be intentional.<sup>35</sup> New Zealand churches which attempted to implement the Cell Church model averaged 50-60% of their congregations in groups, and this is consistent with Faith Community Baptist Church.<sup>36</sup> While meeting the need for community, and seeming to answer the need for evangelism, little growth appeared to result.<sup>37</sup>

One church,<sup>38</sup> which had encountered Ralph Neighbour directly, embarked on the Cell Church model in 1988. This resulted in 80-85% of the 350+ congregation being placed in about 30 inter-generational groups. Unfortunately, the inclusion of non-Christians into Cells, who then became Christians, wasn't seen, and the conclusion was that, in their context, cell groups were inadequate on their own to reach the

33 McKenzie, 'Do we need More or Different Churches?' *NZB*, Sept 1993, 9.

34 Paul Grimmer, interview 3 August 2000. During the early 1990's Grimmer was pastor of Rotorua Baptist Church, becoming the Waikato/Bay of Plenty Regional Superintendent, for the Baptist Union of NZ in 1992.

35 Murray Cottle, interview 14 August 2000; Murray Cottle was pastor of Glen Eden Baptist Church, Auckland (1987-1998), & implemented the Cell Church model.

36 Paul Grimmer, 3 August 2000. Observations from a visit by Paul to Faith Community Baptist Church, and in his role as Regional Superintendent with the NZ Baptist Union.

37 Paul Grimmer, 3 August 2000.

38 Glen Eden Baptist Church, Auckland, under the leadership of Murray Cottle.

community. In 1993 'Seeker Services' were included as part of the Celebration Services, being seen as a harvesting mechanism, with up to 100 people being personally invited by people in Cell groups. Several significant conclusions were drawn in the early 1990's regarding the effectiveness of the Cell Church model:

Cells don't model evangelism, only being an avenue for it to happen if the ethos already exists  
Inter-generational groups weren't overly effective  
The pure Cell Church model makes no allowance for other ministries, such as Alpha.<sup>39</sup>

Generally, in all churches groups had trouble splitting, and many died because they became in-house, focused on only pastoral care or Bible study, rather than looking at issues and how to be a relevant Christian in the community.<sup>40</sup>

Unfortunately, in New Zealand, the model has been sold as a strategy for evangelism, along with Seeker Services, Alpha, Saddleback and Willow Creek models.<sup>41</sup> It has raised awareness of the significance of small groups within the life of the church, but not necessarily in the pure understanding of a cell church.<sup>42</sup> To be able to graft the vision properly the model should be implemented by a small core who have the model firmly implanted in their thinking.<sup>43</sup> They have to show it working for others to catch the vision and get involved. Using this platform three case studies evaluate the effectiveness of this Cell Church model in the N.Z. Baptist context.

39 Murray Cottle, 14 August 2000

40 Ian Brown, 11 August 2000

41 Ian Brown, 11 August 2000

42 Paul Grimmer, 3 August 2000

43 Murray Cottle, 14 August 2000

## Case Study I – Hosanna World Outreach Centre, Taita, Lower Hutt.<sup>44</sup>

Since the official opening in 1994, there are now five full-time pastors and more than 50 cell leaders. There are four services each Sunday and a dozen to twenty converts weekly<sup>45</sup> While embarking wholeheartedly on a Cell Church concept it appears Hosanna did not solely use the model described by Ralph Neighbour, but also sought input from others.<sup>46</sup>

Church lives because of the cells, and from this has developed four concepts:<sup>47</sup>

The cell is the church

Cultural diversity is vital

There is vision for the lost, grounded in prayer

Freedom and trust are given by the leadership to cell members

The Mission Statement is CPR, 'Cells, Prayer, Relationships', and there is a vision in place, which believed God for 100 cells with 1000 members in 2002.<sup>48</sup>

Cells have a number of non-negotiable benchmarks:

Groups are committed to outreach not inreach.

They meet and have relational rather than intensive Bible study.

They exist to multiply when they reach 12-15 members.

Ownership of the group is by Jesus, not the cell.

There is a duly appointed, qualified leader.<sup>49</sup>

44 As well as specifically cited references, material relating to Hosanna World Outreach centre was updated by Pastor Joshua Avia in August 2002.

45 M. Oliver, 'Free To Grow' (unpublished research Paper, Carey Baptist College, 1999) 2.

46 Hosanna World Outreach Centre, *Church Manual, CPR Explosion 2000* (Taita: Hosanna World Outreach Centre, 2000) 4, 7.

47 Oliver 17.

48 J. Avia, *The Launch of a New Generation Cell Church* (Taita: Hosanna World Outreach Centre, 2000), 4.

49 Hosanna World Outreach Centre *DL3 Cell Leadership, Session 3* (Taita: Hosanna World Outreach Centre, 2000). This is the third

Cell leaders create an environment where members feel free to experiment with their Christianity, their gifting and leadership skills.<sup>50</sup> Cells grow, polarising around the leader and trainee as they work towards multiplying. The identification and nurturing of new leaders is a major focus. Leadership of cells is by graduates of their Hosanna Bible College. New converts go straight into a cell, if not already in one, then into the College. Within 12 months they are trained sufficiently to, under supervision, lead a new cell.<sup>51</sup>

A key to an effective cell is relationships, and a typical weekly meeting, of 90-120 minutes, and usually including a meal, has that central, including; welcome; worship – praise, thanksgiving, song, spiritual gifts; word – discussion and application; works – mutual ministry, prayer for unbelievers and planning outreach<sup>52</sup>.

Sunday is for celebration of what God is doing in their midst, with song, dance, humour, and testimony. People are encouraged through biblical teaching primarily focused on the lost. Cell groups are rostered to run the services.<sup>53</sup>

It is not the change in name to 'cell' that has made the difference. It is the philosophy, from the whole 'Home Group' thinking to the whole 'Cell Church' thinking.<sup>54</sup> The cell structure has dramatically closed the 'back door' as the cell is effectively a self-sustaining church. Essentially, the whole church is run in the cells; the caring, relationships, growth and

module of the Hosanna Bible College Discipleship and Leadership Course.

50 Oliver 13.

51 Oliver 4.

52 Oliver 8.

53 Oliver 8.

54 Oliver 18.

nurturing. Members invite their friends into the relationship and they in turn invite and mentor their friends.<sup>55</sup>

By the end of 2000 there were about 30 cell groups. In February 2001 Hosanna launched as a 'Full Cell Church' using their own model called 'The H10 Cell Model', and by August 2002 there were close to 60 cell groups. 'H' stands for Hosanna, '10' is for 10 disciples (cell leaders). It is a kiwi-flavoured model, reflecting cultural differences unique to the local culture. It stands somewhere between the traditional Singaporean model, the Korean model and the G12 model from Bogotá, Columbia. There are new developments of the H10 cell model that will guarantee a huge explosion in cell multiplication.<sup>56</sup>

## **Case Study II – Windsor Park Baptist Church, Auckland<sup>57</sup>**

Windsor Park Baptist Church (WPBC) made a transition to a small group ecclesiology, believing that groups are a significant and viable means of doing church. They represent a strategy for evangelism, as per Ralph Neighbour's model, although evangelism is seen as a by-product rather than the reason for existing.

The 'pure' model is taught, but leadership tolerates a breadth of groups that fulfil specific needs. It is considered that Ralph Neighbour's model requires people to fit too much into a

<sup>55</sup> Oliver 5,6.

<sup>56</sup> More information on the H10 Cell Model can be obtained directly from Pastor Joshua Avia at the Hosanna World Outreach Centre, Taita, Lower Hutt.

<sup>57</sup> Unless otherwise stated, comments in this section are the result of an interview with Brian Winslade, Senior Pastor, Windsor Park Baptist Church.

predefined culture. The underlying ethos is of church being a matrix of small groups. Cell groups are a network of relationships whether or not they meet weekly.

Cell Groups really took off though after the appointment of a pastor with responsibility for cell group development, and training leaders which has been hugely influential. Previously, the 'Home Group' system had resulted in people leading who weren't teachers. This led to bad teaching, or groups 'sitting around' and not moving on in their faith.

The emphasis within groups is on forming community. Its recognised that some people don't like small groups, for a number of reasons:

- They want to remain anonymous

- They don't like groups

- They don't have the time

- They are on a journey to know God (may still be an unbeliever).

Cells meet for building relationships, celebration of what God is doing in people's lives, and an opportunity to develop gifts by exercising body ministry. A study is provided from the previous Sunday's sermon with an application focus, the last question reflecting personal application and change.

Cells allow special needs to be met. A fairly new congregation exists for those with mental illness. They have their own cells and meet weekly for an evening service, which caters for their needs. They are still encouraged to join in the Sunday celebration. At WPBC they 'don't do community' on Sunday. It is a time for teaching, worship and celebration of God at work. Sunday and groups fulfil different needs, so both are considered equally important. Celebration together as wider community is as important as the deeper relationships occurring in groups. WPBC has evolved into the

‘meta-church’<sup>58</sup> model. This means that while placing priority on small groups they don’t strictly stick to the cell model. Other small groups, such as the evangelistic Alpha course, which are designed for specific purposes, are an integral part of the life of the church. These provide diversity within small groups and congregational meetings, to effectively meet the needs of the church and wider community. It seems to be the most effective model for them, with 60-65% of those in their teens or older, being in groups.

### **Case Study III – Albany Baptist Church, Auckland<sup>59</sup>**

When planted in 1992, the leadership team studied aspects of what it meant to be church, and decided to place emphasis on being a Cell Church, with ‘the cell being the church’. After meeting in a home for five months the first public service was held with about 35 people attending, and numbers steadily rose after that. Many of these either came from other churches, or were coming back to church after time out for various reasons.

The leadership as a whole did not effectively catch the vision from the beginning, not fully understanding the implications of what this meant in terms of being church, and therefore it was a continual struggle to foster the growth of cells. There has never really been a focus on evangelism within groups, rather more of a nurturing of Christians within the church who want to be in a group. Even with training being received from WPBC in 1999, by late 2000 there was no

58 C. George, *Prepare Your Church for the Future* (Grand Rapids: Fleming Revell, 1991).

59 This section is a compilation of information from a number of people involved in the planting and development of Albany Baptist Church: Steve Cope, Craig Yates, Kerry Hilton, and raewyn trail, who updated it in August 2002..

noticeable change in the number of cells or evangelistic outlook by groups. There was no defined structure to groups. Several times sermon notes have been made available, with questions, but generally, these have not been used well within groups. It has been a struggle to bring unbelievers or new Christians into an established group. This has been particularly true for those groups still operating in the old 'Home Group' mode, of semi-closed membership, meeting for in-depth Bible study. More recently though, a few new believers have been assimilated into established groups. The underlying problem has not been the assimilation, but the desire for evangelism, and the outworking of it by groups. While in their heads acknowledging that the 'cell is the church' and should have priority, tradition continually came to the fore and the main focus remained on Sunday services. The vision was not transferred adequately to the congregation to inspire and motivate them to change their historical focus on Sunday, to a cell group meeting during the week. Everything else in the life of the church has been done to supplement what happens on Sunday. Over a ten year period no groups have multiplied. The total number of groups involves about half the congregation. The newest group started as an Alpha Group, and continued on as a cell group.

## Reflection

Hosanna World Outreach Centre has the Cell Church vision enshrined in its Mission Statement of CPR, and a core focus on evangelism.<sup>60</sup> The multiplication of cells is their prime method of 'doing church'. The leadership is passionate about the vision and actively involved. They have a pastor responsible for cell

60 Hosanna World Outreach Centre *Church Manual, CPR Explosion 2000*, 7.



group co-ordination. Cells are fully resourced with trained leaders, study material and mentoring oversight. Sunday is a Celebration. Another key factor, unique to this church among the three, is the multi-cultural base, where relationships, especially inter-generational aspects, are more inherent in the culture. This has probably made it easier to move into an effective Cell Church.

While vision is strong at Windsor Park Baptist Church, it is for the importance and relevance of *small* groups, rather than *cell* groups. WPBC has therefore moved to a meta-church model, rather than the pure Cell Church model. The leadership as a whole is committed to this vision, and their commitment is seen in the training and resourcing of groups by a pastor. Sunday is for celebration and teaching. Numerous in-between gatherings and training sessions are held as 'congregation' events. While the 'pure' model is taught, the flexibility of the leadership to other special needs groups seems to be a strength here.

Because the leadership as a whole did not catch the original vision at Albany, there was never the necessary passion and enthusiasm behind the claim 'the cell is the church'. Subsequent leaders often never had the vision, or desire to be in small groups. On that basis it is hard for a leadership to foster a vision that actively encourages cell groups as the way of being church. Sunday continues to be the focal point for church life, with a number of small groups, all with different styles, operating during the week.

The stronger the vision, passion and commitment of the leadership to adequately resource cells/small groups the greater the success. While this statement probably applies to most ventures, it can be seen within the three case study examples. At Hosanna World Outreach Centre and WPBC leaders are involved. At Albany, a minority of the leadership participates in groups, let alone lead. This makes it virtually impossible to

foster the Cell Church model. Forming groups on the basis of geographical location does not work effectively. Relationships need to be the basis, but what about gender and inter-generational aspects? In the Neighbour model group members were originally mixed gender, but of similar life stages because of relationships. However, over recent years they have purposely become inter-generational, to provide diversity and be representative of the community at large.<sup>61</sup> Traditionally, New Zealand groups have often been single sex (e.g. women's Bible study, men's ministry, youth etc). This may still be appropriate within the cell context, as they provide better for intimacy and sharing of needs. The essential factors are the provision of leadership with vision and adequate resources.

## **Conclusion**

'Churches have to discover their missionary calling in their own country, making the form of church in their own civilisation apparent'.<sup>62</sup> The Cell Church model is an appropriate model for church within the theological parameters described earlier. It has proved extremely valuable and relevant in some cultures, but met with varying degrees of success in New Zealand. While many Baptist Churches in New Zealand have instigated the cell concept not many have shared the joy of cell multiplication.<sup>63</sup> If this reflects Albany, then Albany is not an abnormal failure, but rather a representation of what many have tried and struggled with. The other examples show though that church can effectively function with the cell/small group as the main focal point, and an effective Cell Church model can be

61 B.C.C. Jenkins, interview October 2000.

62 Moltmann 8.

63 Oliver 3.

implemented, as has been done with varying success by a number of other churches in New Zealand. To do so requires a vision which sees the cell/small group as a way of being church, rather than a strategy for evangelism or church growth. It requires ignoring the traditionally inherent New Zealand mind-set that is against American or other overseas models. It also necessitates a change away from the traditional mode of revolving everything around the Sunday Service. Essential is a clear vision, passion and commitment by leadership, an ethos for evangelism and a willingness to make it happen.

**Rhys Morgan**