



DMM Strategies in Non-Traditional Contexts

By **DOUG LUCAS** with
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Doug Lucas founded Team Expansion in 1978 and, over 40 years later, still serves as the organization's president. www.teamexpansion.org

North Americans have a reputation for innovation as several churches and individuals are finding unique ways to implement Kingdom Movement (CPM/DMM) strategies in North America and not all of them are relying on existing local churches.

Take Lee Wood for instance. The moment he first learned about CPM/DMM strategies, he loved them. He began talking to and praying with down-and-outers on the streets of Tampa, FL. These were people who were far from God—and light-years from existing church culture. Little by little, God began doing something in their lives. Within a few short weeks, Lee had started 60 groups single-handedly! He chuckles at himself these days. “I didn’t even think about how busy that would make me. I didn’t even know I wasn’t supposed to try to do it all by myself. I just wanted to implement. Fortunately, I had a great mentor who refused to give up on me.” Today, researchers estimate that the “genealogical tree” that has resulted has now topped 3,000 new believers—and it’s still growing.

Keep in mind—Lee’s work didn’t really happen in the context of the local church. These were people who were pretty much off everybody’s radar. But CPM/DMM strategies shine in those circumstances.

Take Mark Aspinwall for instance. He first learned about CPM/DMM strategies in 2010 when he flew with Curtis Sergeant to a large island in the Pacific to help organize a series of trainings. He’s never been the same since. The next thing Mark knew, he was in charge of training for that island. If he was going to help with training *them*, he reasoned, he should be implementing it *himself*. He decided to start a group in his house and, well, the rest is history.

Talking with Mark, it’s hard to miss the fact that this CPM/DMM stuff is hard work. For his first group, he invited 16 families to a three-thirds group, only to have just one family show up. Mark laughs, “Fortunately, that family had 8 children and we had 4. It felt like a full house!” But in short order, 30 people were taking part in this thing Mark had started. Most of the 30 were teenagers. They desired fellowship. They loved visiting. “The kids picked it up faster than we did,” Mark says. “They had less to unlearn. We watched our own children, and their friends get serious about doing what Jesus says, and sharing it with others.”

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With that as the basis, the group in Mark’s house had grown to 23. That’s not 23 people. That’s 23 groups!

Once again, this wasn’t really happening primarily in the context of a local church, though some of his participants did attend a local church on the side. International students at a nearby university turned out to be one of the most fruitful fields. Many wanted to practice English so Mark’s wife would patiently have conversation groups with them. From there, she would invite them to practice English by discussing stories from the Bible. And when they would return to nations like China or Argentina, Mark and his wife would keep on communicating with them and encouraging them. They didn’t do it for pay.

This was “zero budget missions.” They did it because they felt that if they failed to do it, they would be failing as Jesus followers. So now, Mark “fishes Facebook.” He studies the Bible with people over Zoom. “With the pandemic,” he observes, “geography has pretty much been taken off the table.”

Today, Mark wistfully looks back at the last ten years of his life with an almost Charles Dickens’ mentality. “They’ve been the best of times—and they’ve been the worst of times.” He constantly says that he “fails forward.” For this reason, Mark understands why local pastors aren’t that excited about CPM/DMM strategies. “It doesn’t solve any of their problems,” Mark quips. “In fact,” he adds, “many of these groups might not ever walk in the door of a single traditional church building.” He’s probably right. And some church members will bow out, once they learn about the higher bar of commitment. To be a movement “doer” requires about six hours a week: two hours/week evangelizing, two hours/week with an existing group called “My Spiritual Family” and two hours/week starting a new group—the next generation. This is doable for someone with a job and a family; but not if they are also involved in lots of “big church” activities. For this reason, Mark theorizes that few “traditional church people” will ever migrate to CPM/DMM practices. “Once they take part in all their church programming, they probably realistically just don’t have time.” So Mark often finds himself talking to pastors of churches that his group members attend. He never asks the pastor to release them. But he does ask the pastor to “protect their time.” Mark clarifies, “He’ll need to tell the other church people, ‘This guy is doing exactly what we need him to do.’” If the pastor is willing, Mark believes it *would* be possible for existing church people to help advance a Kingdom Movement.

We asked Mark if he were to have any words of wisdom for someone just starting out—what would they be? He responded immediately. “Plan on it being hard. Every step of the way it’s hard. You have to share the gospel with a lot of people before one says yes. You have to train many before someone sticks. A few weeks on—they stop answering your calls. Plan on experiencing a certain amount of alienation from the church people with whom you grew up. And for the first five years, it will be *very* up and down.” Mark remembers he’d go through a phase in which he’d become very excited because it would all be working—then the entire thing would crash. But even with all the challenges, he still explains, “These have been the most fruitful years of our entire lives.” He summed it all up this way: “The Great Commission is the

primary mandate for every Christian. I finally feel like I’m following the mandate.”

Jeff Timblin is a mobilizer for e3 Partners full-time in Orange County, California. He is also pastor of a “legacy church” which is incorporating these strategies. He loves the simple church. As he began to see people coming alive with these kingdom strategies, he essentially started a church in his living room as a kind of leadership pod that would multiply. He also worked with others, explaining what God is doing. Little by little, God raised up 13 gatherings in homes that Jeff refers to as a “gathering of churches.” Most recently, he’s started a “residency” program, like Bryan King, Justin, and Zach. They do two different residencies, one year each. These residencies are nearly a year long—like an internship. Several legacy churches have jumped on board, learning to utilize these residencies. They currently meet out in the middle of a field outdoors, with 200 people practicing social distancing. Interestingly, they are still multiplying church-wide circles, even during Covid. Another 50-100 are meeting away from the normal building, away from traditional church life.

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Jeff is also on staff as a “legacy church pastor.” By that, we mean that he has a foot in both worlds—a foot in the existing local church and a foot in these multiplying

groups. These days, he's focusing most of his time training people and developing leaders.

For the last nine years, Zach Medlock has teamed up with a friend named Ron to focus on Memphis, TN. Since early 2012, they've prayed and planned with a "no place left" vision that God would raise up disciple-makers from every zip code and people group in Memphis, TN. They're praying for 41 zip codes and 25 people groups plus seven different social segments. They're looking for a way to launch a church in each of these entities. These last few years, they've also focused on residencies. They define these as committed groups of laborers who want to learn and obey the Great Commission together for a set period of time. During the past eight years, they've facilitated dozens of these, "failing forward." One of their consummate moments was in 2017. They had all these leaders emerging, but they were all compartmentalized so they asked the leaders to share together in a nine-month cohort. They had 23 units join -- 30 people in all. This idea took Memphis to an entirely new level. These cohorts are like iron sharpening iron. They strengthen one another, ask for each other's help, and make each one better. Some of these participants come in from outside, while some are church members from inside. Just in the past

year, they've staged five of these residencies. They model them after the Hall of Tyrannus in Acts. (Acts 19:9-10) Some focus more on establishing or leading existing churches. Others focus more on disciple-making and now, there are training centers emerging. Bryan King and Jeff are doing something similar in Tulsa and Orange County, respectively.

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Zach and the group challenge residency participants to be involved in a local church if they're able—but the priority is experiencing CPM/DMM strategies first hand. These residencies hold a lot of promise for the future because of the high-level leaders they can produce through their longer, more in-depth format.

All of these and many others are pushing the edges of Kingdom Movements farther and farther out in North America. Which edge might *you* push? 

