

North American Kingdom Movement Strategies Apart From a Local Church

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In the other articles featured in this edition of *Mission Frontiers*, most of the examples have come from efforts in partnership with existing local churches. These almost all involve people who still attend some expression of the local church in traditional North American church buildings. But there's **another** way to utilize Kingdom Movement (CPM/DMM) strategies. One can conceivably start totally from scratch. In this type of approach, it then becomes optional as to whether or not participants are encouraged to participate in worship services in a traditional church building while they are also "doing church" in an expression of church that meets in small groups in homes.

This case study is about an emerging "Disciple Making Movement" (DMM) in Northern Michigan, led by Nathan Venton and Nick Tumi. Here's a timeline-summary of their efforts.

Pre-2015

Nathan goes to Bible school and seminary in Michigan, and then he and his wife move to China as missionaries. During their time there, they conclude that the traditional way of doing ministry with church buildings, preaching sermons and theological training is not always effective at multiplying obedient disciples of Jesus. After reading the book, *T4T: A Discipleship Revolution* (by Ying Kai and Steve Smith, WIGTake Resources, 2011), Nathan feels God telling him to start implementing CPM/DMM strategies. He and his family move to Florida to start working with Biglife to make disciples who multiply (big.life).

Nick is the pastor of a large, successful church in Traverse City, Michigan. Over the years as he reads the New Testament, he knows something isn't right with the way

he is "doing church," but doesn't know what it is. When he is introduced to Biglife and CPM/DMM, he realizes he needs to live in that style of discipleship, as he feels like he can no longer disciple people by preaching a single 30-minute sermon once a week without personal interaction or accountability. He humbly makes plans to transition away from the church that he started by giving away the church to another church with a similar style that wanted to expand into the area.

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2015

Nathan and Nick, recently connected to each other, are trained by Curtis Sergeant at his Metacamp training on how to make disciples who multiply (metacamp.org/). Nathan starts to implement it in Florida, but also trains some family members in Traverse City during his time there that summer in what he had just learned about making disciples. He also starts to disciple people overseas.

Nick continues to pastor his church, but is in the final stages of giving away the ministry to another church. He starts a discipleship group, but it is attached to the church and is more like a Bible study because everyone is still involved in the church building and activities.

2016

Nathan starts a few discipleship groups in Florida, but they all fail to continue on after the first two years as the people were not obedient to share the gospel or follow up with those who came to faith.

Nick starts the transition process to give away the church he started to another church. He starts to train some people in northern Michigan and Nathan's family members also start to disciple people they know. A few groups are started, and they also connect every month or so for leadership training and fellowship.

2017

Nathan is traveling up to 12 weeks a year overseas to disciple people so he and his wife move to Traverse City, Michigan, to be near family.

Nathan partners with Nick to help make disciples in northern Michigan. When Nathan moved, most of the discipleship was being done by "trainings" and people were not being discipled in their homes by an actual disciple-maker going there to show them how to do things and then help them as they do it. So Nathan makes a commitment to doing an actual "model and assist" with everyone, if possible, in their own home, instead of doing two or three-day intensive trainings. Nathan and Nick also go back and do the "model and assist" for each person who went through the training. All of the people trained in the previous years also go to a church building, and they find that they are not really doing what they need to do. During the year, they "filter" for those who will be obedient no matter the cost. Most people just go back to the church building and stop, but a few people are left.

2018

Nathan and Nick continue to disciple people and up to a dozen groups form. However, some of them stop because of discouragement of not winning people to Christ and they go back to the church building instead of sticking it out and meeting as the church in their home.

Nick's church transition also doesn't go well, and the transition causes a lot of discouragement and spiritual attacks. Nick is faithful to continue on in spite of the problems.

2019

Nathan and Nick continue the "slow grind" of making disciples in a post-Christian western context. By this time, one of Nick's disciples starts discipling a man in a prison in the Upper Peninsula of Michigan, and the prisoners are quick to implement the discipleship training. By the end of the year, they have multiple generations of disciples,

many of whom are new believers. It is a common occurrence to see someone sharing the gospel out in the prison yard.

Nathan also feels the need to help people see the larger vision beyond just making disciples and meeting in homes as the church, so the emerging team makes a commitment to meet quarterly, in person, for leadership training. They also commit to having the network of disciples across northern Michigan meet monthly for online prayer, so people can pray with other disciples in the network as a "regional church." By this time, people are making disciples in at least four different towns around northern Michigan, but only one to two groups are in each town, not including the prison work.

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2020



During the Covid-19 pandemic, God lays it on the hearts of Nathan, Nick, and a few others in northern Michigan to pray together daily for the region. For two months, they gather together online each night to pray. During this time, there are a few salvations, even though they are

in lockdown. One is Mariah, who is baptized in a horse trough in her living room by her parents while people watch on zoom. When traditional churches were thrown a curve ball, the group was able to continue using simple methods to live as disciples. Mariah then starts to use the internet to share about Jesus with her relational network from her time overseas, and disciples are starting to be made in Hawaii and Indonesia, even though she can't even leave her house!

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After the lockdown ends, the emerging movement commits to praying together weekly on Tuesday nights. They also create a Facebook group for communication between people in the network, and a simple website (big.life/team/nmi). So things like occasional regional gatherings, prayer, leaders meetings and an internet presence help give the group some rhythms and routines as a "regional church" so people can see and feel like they are part of the larger, decentralized, organic movement.

There are now about 15 discipleship groups around northern Michigan, with anywhere from six to 15 people per group and another seven groups in at least two prisons, with three to five people per group (although there might be more as Nathan says it's hard to track groups in prisons since inmates are routinely being transferred). In all, there are now over 100 people participating.

We asked Nathan to sum up some of the lessons learned from the past four or five years.

Effective Strategies

- Use simple approaches that anyone can do.
- We try not to do two or three-day trainings anymore. Instead, we simply live life-on-life with people in their homes, showing them how to make disciples in the context of daily life. Then we assist them as they learn to carry out these strategies.
- Prayer, both personally and together with others, is the foundation upon which a movement is built.

- For our purposes, in our own efforts in northern Michigan, we have decided to encourage people not to attend both a church building and a house church (discipleship group). We have found thus far that if people try to do both, their time and priorities will be divided and they will not do either well. Our network is built on people meeting as the church in their homes, however, every region is different. We certainly would never discourage people from being involved in a more traditional church (many of us came to Christ in one!).

Obstacles and Challenges

- We have to keep on persevering. It is very difficult to carry out CPM/DMM strategies in a Western context with church buildings everywhere. You will be looked at as weird. Believers will be facing constant temptations to revert to attending traditional church buildings. Don't give up!
- You have to be comfortable with groups failing. They will. You are constantly filtering for the obedient people who will obey no matter what the cost.
- Spiritual attacks on health, family and ministry.
- Some new believers not wanting to share the gospel and make disciples—mostly because they are too busy.
- It is difficult to form new groups around new believers. Westerners have a mindset of wanting to "grow and split" their discipleship groups/home churches. Try to form new groups around new people instead of adding them into existing groups. Take the time to disciple them.

It's important to remember that a faithful disciple is a faithful disciple, wherever he or she attends. If you serve as the one to usher in a new believer and that new believer eventually joins a church that meets in a traditional church building, it's obviously still a win for the kingdom.

We encourage any and all to realize that God's kingdom is still God's kingdom, regardless of its expression or context. 