MentorNet #72 **A SYSTEM APPROACH TO CHURCH-PLANTING ENDEAVOURS**Copyright © 2010 by Galen Currah, Edward Aw and George Patterson.  
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This MentorNet article leans to the theoretical side. There is a growing interest amongst church-planting ministries and those who support them, to learn what ‘makes things tick.’ One useful analytical approach to understand organizations and programmes derives from *system theory*. Church-planting ministries can be viewed as a set of sub-systems that interact together, such that, when one sub-system functions poorly, it sends ripple effects through the other sub-systems. Mentors help church planters find weak points in a sub-system and set them right. You can formulate questions to ask about points and issues that these sub-systems imply in their interactions (see page 2). Here are ten such sub-systems. No wonder the task seems daunting!

1. **Theological Sub-system (thinking God’s thoughts)**
   1. How do workers adopt biblical promises, priorities and practices?
   2. How do workers express their Kingdom vision, mission and values?
   3. In what ways do workers plan by faith to implement their vision, mission and values?
2. **Spiritual Sub-system (experiencing God’s reality)**
3. In what ways do workers practice spirituality, prayer and discernment?
4. Describe how workers operate by gifts of the Spirit, in love.
5. Site instances of workers overcoming evil and opposition by faith.
6. **Evangelical Sub-system (proclaiming God’s message)**
7. How clearly to workers communicate the original, apostolic Good News?
8. How do workers discover and follow family, community and social networks?
9. What help to workers require in order to design suitable messages and media?
10. **Ecclesial Sub-system (reproducing God’s people)**
11. What highly-replicable forms, structures and activities have workers introduced?
12. In what ways do worshipers experience the Presence of Jesus Christ in their midst?
13. Cite examples of worshipers reproducing churches in their social networks?
14. **Training Sub-system (forming God’s workers)**
15. What is the ratio of formal instruction to obedience-oriented mentoring?
16. Describe how workers are incorporated into extended training chains.
17. With what appropriate materials do mentors supply their apprentice leaders?
18. **Leadership Sub-system (guiding God’s flocks)**
19. Describe how the five-fold ministers operate together in teams.
20. What are the steps workers follow to appoint provisional, tested elders and deacons?
21. Depend on gifting, growth, motivation and skills.
22. **Discipleship Sub-system (rearing God’s children)**
23. In what ways to workers empower believers to obey Jesus’ commandments?
24. What Christian doctrine, values, attitudes and behaviour do workers teach everywhere?
25. What personal, family and group disciplines do new churches teach and practice?
26. **Compassion Sub-system (honouring God’s image)**
27. What are the steps that workers take to enable local communities to meet their needs better?
28. Cite examples of workers providing temporary relief and sustainable community development.
29. What training and resources to workers have for reaching out to social groups at risk?
30. **Financial Sub-system (supporting God’s work)**
31. Describe the ministry’s current worker support structures.
32. How do workers empower self-supported leaders and churches for continual expansion?
33. Describe current churches’ practices of giving to meet needs and to send evangelists.
34. **Monitoring and Evaluation Sub-system (tracking God’s blessing)**
35. Track and measure selected ‘indicators’ of outcomes from the work.
36. Report and compile data from the field that inform leaders who make timely tactical choices.
37. Compare outcomes with faith goals, adjust strategies, adopt tactics, and train workers.

**Tentative Sorting Scheme of 100 Systemic Issues that Arise in Reproductive Church Planting  
from Ten Inter-acting Sub-systems**

This table is intended to do several things: (a) to demonstrate the complexity of church multiplication work, (b) to suggest facets of the work that may require more prayer or better planning, and (c) to help identify points of weakness, dysfunction and breakdown in church-planting endeavours.

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| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | **Theological** | **Spiritual** | **Evangelical** | **Ecclesial** | **Training** | **Financial** | **Leadership** | **Discipleship** | **Compassion** | **Monitoring** |
| **Theological** | Theological priorities | Sound spirituality | Content of Good News | Who are the church | Doctrinal standards | Theology of finance | Leader roles described | Theology for disciples | Believers’ good works | Theology of evaluation |
| **Spiritual** | Spiritual outcomes | Priority of experience | Power in evangelism | Spirituality in churches | Experience standards | Cheerfulness in giving | Spirituality of leaders | Spirituality of disciples | Spiritual motives | Motives for monitoring |
| **Evangelical** | Salvation theology | Spirituality / evangelism | Outcome expectations | Evangelism in churches | Evangelism training | Financing evangelism | Work of evangelists | Evangelistic witness | Evangelism/ compassion | Evangelistic effectiveness |
| **Ecclesial** | Truth for churches | Needs of churches | Evangelism for growth | Churches’ self-identity | On-the-job training | account-ability | Local leaders | Disciple-making | Church compassion | CP effectiveness |
| **Training** | Training theologians | Training in spirituality | Training evangelists | Training for reproduction | Training trainers | Training in stewardship | Training church elders | How to make disciples | Training deacons | Training progress | |
| **Financial** | Financing theologians | Self-support in ministry | Imitable methods | Financing mission | Financing training | Financial accounts | Remunerate elders | Disciples’ stewardship | Financing compassion | Cost of monitoring |
| **Leadership** | Leaders as theologians | Leaders’ spirituality | Leaders’ evangelism | Leading new churches | Leaders train newer ones | Leader stewardship | Extending ‘chains’ | Leading for discipleship | Compassion leadership | Managing monitoring |
| **Discipleship** | Priority of obedience | Obedience as spiritual life | Obedience in evangelism | Obedience in churches | Obedience in training | Obedience in finances | Obedient leaders | Obeying Jesus’ orders | Obedience in compassion | Responsible discipline |
| **Compassion** | Compassion in theology | Compassion / spirituality | Compassion- ate gospel | Church compassion | Training for compassion | Giving for Compassion | Leaders’ compassion | Disciples’ compassion | Compassion that loves | Priority to meet needs |
| **Monitoring** | Tracking studies | Tracking obedience | Gospel progress | Counting churches | Verifying accounts | Counting generations | Counting disciples | Tracking projects | Monitoring reports | Monitor monitoring |

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