



Not just disciples, but disciple makers

BY MARVIN LORENZANA

Missio Dei is published by Mennonite Mission Network to invite reflection and dialogue about God's mission in today's world. Some features in the series focus primarily on the biblical and theological foundations of the mission task. Others present ministry case studies or personal stories of attempts to be faithful to Christ's call. Perspectives represented reflect the passion and commitment of the agency: to declare in word and demonstrate in life the whole gospel of Jesus Christ, "across the street, all through the marketplaces, and around the world."

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By Marvin Lorenzana

Introduction

Who was this missionary? It was a hot and humid summer night. The year was 1975. In my Roman Catholic family at that time, my father was devoted to the tradition of his ancestors, and my mother . . . well, let's just say that she was not too excited about having any religious affiliation at all. On that night, Allan, my 14-year old brother, invited me, only 10 at that time, to tag along with him to a public school building where he had been going for several months "to learn more about Jesus."

In fact, Allan was taking me to "church." About 300 mostly young people had gathered that night in the central patio of a run-down school right in the center of Tegucigalpa, the capital city of Honduras. I heard a missionary from North America preach that night. But . . . who was this man?

The man was Edward King, a Mennonite missionary and sociologist who had come to Honduras, along with his wife, Gloria, and their five children, to teach people how to read and write as part of their work with an international faith-based organization focusing on literacy, health and nutritional training, job and skills formation, and community development.

I became a believer in Christ that night after hearing Pastor King preach the gospel with such passion that I could only respond with a "yes!" to his invitation to meet Jesus. My discipleship journey with Jesus began on that unforgettable night in 1975 under the starry skies of Tegucigalpa.

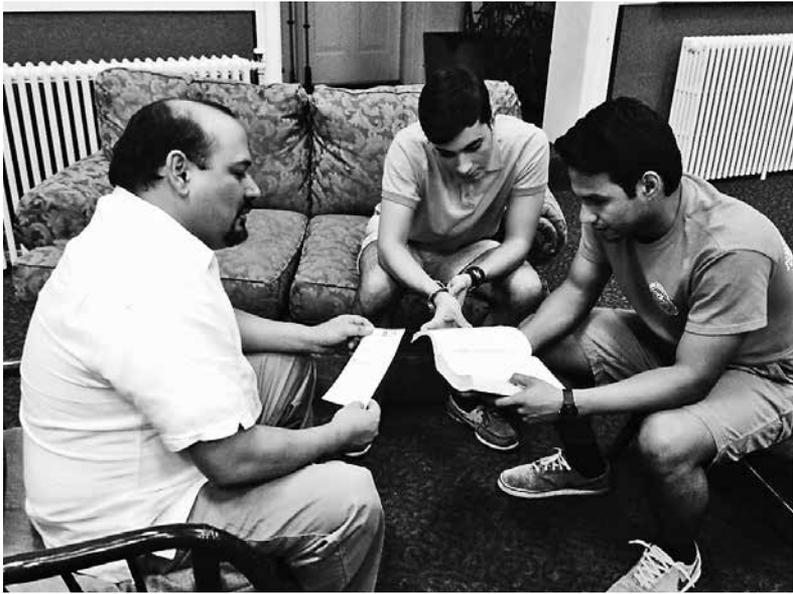


Photo provided

Through the Missional Discipleship Initiative, committed and experienced believers grow in their faith through mentoring relationships.

From cell groups to the making of a movement. From the outset, Edward King’s emphasis was on one-to-one discipleship. He believed that anybody—as long as he or she lived under the lordship of Jesus Christ—had potential for kingdom impact in the world. As the good Anabaptist that he was, King fully trusted in the empowering of the Holy Spirit and in a commitment to the “ministry of all believers.” The backbone of the movement was the creation of cell groups, made up of seven to 15 people and led by lay leaders whose main goal was to make not only disciples, but disciple makers!

It was not long until the disciple-making movement that the King family ignited in Tegucigalpa reached beyond Honduras. In 1985, Ed and Gloria King moved to New Orleans, Louisiana, to plant the first church of the movement outside of Honduras. This new church began—as was the usual practice—with a cell group. That single group soon grew and multiplied into the first church established in the United States. Today, there are churches associated with this movement located in 60 cities in Honduras, along with several more planted in the United States and Europe.

Calling disciples to be “disciple makers” is grounded in Jesus’ own ministry. Matthew 28:16-20 is the passage in the Gospels that we know as the Great Commission, given to the first disciples by Jesus at the end of his earthly ministry. In this passage, the mandate is to go and make disciples of all peoples, teaching them everything that Jesus had commanded. Jesus ended his ministry in the same way he had begun it, calling his disciples to redirect and transform their fishing occupations to instead “fish for people” (Matthew 4:19). In order for them to be effective in their mission, however, they would first need to learn how to faithfully follow Jesus in their own lives. In so doing, they would become leaders in a movement that Jesus named “the kingdom of God” with characteristics that would eventually impact the entire world.

I do not believe that when Edward and Gloria King decided to move from their ministry in Bolivia to Tegucigalpa, Honduras, they intended to begin a disciple-making movement among young people in this tropical Central American country. Nevertheless, God used these humble servants from Ohio to do exactly that!

Why is missional discipleship so important today?

The institutionalization of discipleship. The vibrant, life-shaping discipleship experience I lived during my early years as a disciple of Jesus back in Honduras continues to impact my life even today. Sadly, about 15 years into the growing phase of the congregation founded by Ed King, the original one-to-one emphasis for disciple making was systematically replaced by a three-level, thematic, Bible-based curriculum experience that both new believers and potential leaders were required to complete as part of their “discipling process.”

Just a few years after this new paradigm was adopted, the original strong impulse toward an intentionally relational and mostly organic disciple-making experience began to fade away. Though this congregation continues to thrive and grow even today, its potential for further exponential multiplication and expansion has been crippled.

Discipleship becomes institutionalized when it is co-opted by human methodologies. Somehow, we seem to believe that *our* methods are better than *Jesus’* methods of disciple making. Discipleship cannot and should not be put in an institutional box as it is by nature

an organic relational process between human beings with enormous potential for the transformation of all participants and the spiritual renewal of local congregations.

A church in decline. The church in Tegucigalpa is just an example of what many consider to be a trend in the Western church today. This church is facing a crisis of epic proportions due in part, though not exclusively, to a fundamental abandonment of the practice of effective multiplication of new disciples of Jesus. This decline can be directly linked to the churches' neglect of the important practices outlined and modeled by Jesus for the reproduction and effective disciple-making priority of continually calling forth new disciples of Jesus. Let's take the United States as an example of what we are talking about.

A 2015 report conducted by the Pew Research Center states that the percentage of Americans who describe themselves as Christians fell about 8 points—from 78.4 percent to 70.6 percent—between 2007 and 2014. During that same period, Americans identifying as having no religion grew from 16 to 23 percent, now numbering 56 million—the second largest community after “Evangelicals” (BBC Online).

A more recent study—“The State of the Church 2016”—conducted by the Barna Group, reported that 73 percent of Americans claimed to be Christian, though when a variable like church attendance was added to the mix, “a majority (of the population) becomes the minority.” When a self-identified Christian attends a religious service at least once a month and says that their faith is very important in their life, Barna considers that person a “practicing Christian.”¹ If one combines the factors of self-identification and church attendance, the study reports that “the numbers drop to around one in three U.S. adults (31 percent) who fall under this classification.” This figure, according to Barna, might be a more accurate description of Christian faith in America, a trend that reflects the reality of a nation moving toward secularization.²

¹ See <https://www.barna.com/research/state-church-2016/>.

² Mennonite Church USA is not an exception to the declining trend in church numbers, though the reasons for this are quite varied and somewhat complex. One study documenting these trends is by Mennonite sociologist and pastor, Conrad Kanagy, in *Road Signs for the Journey: A Profile of Mennonite Church USA* (Harrisonburg, Virginia: Herald Press, 2007).



Photo by saar Fast

Gloria Acosta reads her Bible with two discipleship members, Genesis Dubon (left) and Joselyn Mendoza, at *Iglesia Menonita Encuentro de Renovación* in Miami.

Consumer Christianity. Sadly, too often the church in the West has become nothing more than a provider of religious products and services, catering on a weekly basis to the masses of believers who mistakenly believe that church attendance and active participation in church-sponsored events equals a meaningful discipleship experience with Jesus.

Unfortunately, this phenomenon is often encouraged and perpetuated by church leaders who find contentment in filling physical spaces with hot bodies and excited worshippers. These, in turn, are left unchallenged by more biblical forms of discipleship, and settle for weekend church attendance as fulfillment of their Christian duty.

Take, for example, the mega-church model that in many ways perpetuates the individualistic and consumerist tendencies of North American culture, and promotes the idea that the individual is the center of the universe in search of satisfying his or her own personal needs. Many church leaders are unfortunately content with bringing people into their fellowships without challenging them to grow beyond being mere believers to becoming faithful, fruitful disciples of Jesus. Sometimes unwittingly, sometimes intentionally, people are invited to become consumers of

religious goods and services provided for them each week. And soon they begin to think that *they*—rather than *God* and *God's mission*—are the principal reason for the church's weekend gatherings.

Not just disciples ... disciple makers! Discipleship is a process that involves two vital tasks:

1. *Faithfulness*, with the help of the Holy Spirit, in following the way of Jesus in one's own life.
2. *Effectiveness*, again and always with the help of the Holy Spirit, in multiplying the life of Christ within us in the lives of others.

These are two halves of the same whole and are crucial to the life of a true disciple of Jesus. Biblical discipleship is only complete when a faithful disciple of Jesus learns—in an intentional and relational way—how to make another faithful disciple of Jesus. Once this cycle is in motion, the discipling experience should be repeated over and over again until several generations of disciples naturally emerge.

The need to provide a discipleship experience for every member of the church should become an *involuntary reflex* rather than a *cumber-some duty* for local congregations. A healthy, faithful, and reproductive disciple of Jesus is the most fundamental life-block of the organic kingdom of God. This is the way the kingdom of God is supposed to expand and grow—one disciple of Jesus at a time!

What, then, does missional discipleship look like?

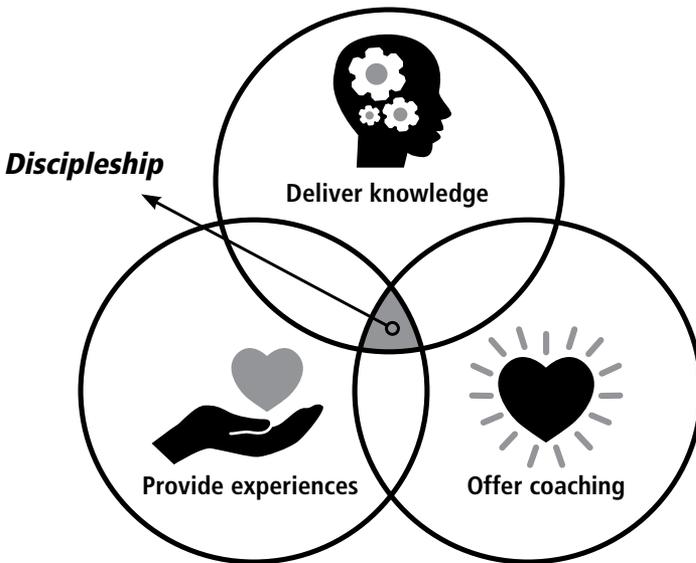
Jesus and his disciples. Jesus called men and women as his disciples. He spent close to three years, as we know, building up his followers. During that time, he taught the original 12 disciples much of what they needed to know in order to fulfill the mission to which he was calling them.

It is also quite possible that the 12 helped Jesus train a larger group of 70 or 72 disciples (Luke 10). It is not a stretch to assume that Jesus' inner circle was being trained while also helping Jesus train others. Jesus wanted the 12 to know exactly how to multiply what they had received, sharing it with others. In fact, we find Jesus in the Gospels teaching

the same lessons over and over again to new groups of followers. The disciples would have intuitively used the same approach in nurturing their own disciples as Jesus had used with them and with the 70.

Jesus initially invested himself in a group of 12 men. These men spent three years in close relationship with Jesus during his public ministry. The very heart of Jesus' ministry was his investment in the lives of his disciples. We call this process discipleship.

As we observe Jesus in the discipling process, we see him using a holistic approach that included head, heart and hands.



1. **Head**—because he was a teacher, a rabbi, to the disciples, someone who wanted to make sure they knew how to think rightfully about what the kingdom of God was all about. His disciples were so impressed with Jesus' teaching style that "they were amazed at his teaching, because his message had authority" (Luke 4:32).
2. **Heart**—because Jesus tested their hearts' motivations by asking the disciples thought-provoking questions. Jesus knew well that the human heart deceives by nature and he wanted to make sure the disciples' actions were driven by God's purposes and not by their own selfish desires for glory, fame or power. So, in Mark 8:17, Jesus asks them, "Why are you talking about having no bread? Do

you still not see or understand? Are your hearts hardened?” And in John 21:16a he wants to know of them, specifically directed at Peter, “Do you truly love me?”

3. **Hands**—because it is never enough to have right thinking or right motivations if these do not move a disciple to action. It is not only about being good, but about being good *for something meaningful*. The Gospels are full of instances where Jesus invites the disciples to get their hands dirty with the work of ministry. We find him directing them in Matthew 14:16 to “give them something to eat,” when faced with hungry crowds who had followed Jesus to a deserted area. We also learn from the Gospels that at some point Jesus was baptizing more people than John the Baptist. But upon closer examination we are told that it wasn’t Jesus who was doing the work; it was, in fact, his disciples who were baptizing the multitudes who had come to Jesus (John. 4:1-3). This is the discipling pattern that Jesus used. And it is not difficult to imagine that he also expects us to follow his example today in order to continue the ministry of reconciliation that he began.

Missional discipleship—an urgent need for today. We strongly believe that the missional church conversation is the right one to have at this particular juncture in time. It is a conversation that has been ongoing for at least the past 30 years. Even when many church leaders have grown tired, bored, or even frustrated by this conversation, the church is truly *missional* only if the types of disciples that it generates are on board and fully engaged with God’s reconciling mission on this planet.

There is nothing more missional than teaching common believers how to become disciples of Jesus who, in turn, master the art of teaching others how to do the same. There will never be—and, in fact, *cannot* be—a missional church without reproducing missional disciples of Jesus! The church is truly the church only when it is busy making missional disciples of Jesus—that is, disciples making new disciples, developing new leaders, and planting *new* congregations, which in turn become the context where even more *new* disciples of Jesus are being developed.



Photo provided

A monthly men's discipleship meeting at *Iglesia Menonita Garifuna de Manhattan*.

Defining two key terms—*disciple* and *disciple making*—is important

As we continue this discussion, it is important for us to define clearly the principal terms most frequently used here—the terms of *disciple* and *disciple making*.

- 1. Disciple.** We have found particularly helpful the work of Mike Breen, founder of 3DM ministries, in this regard. Breen writes in *Multiplying Missional Leaders* that a disciple is a person who learns to be like Jesus and learns to do what Jesus would do, were he in their situation. A disciple, according to Breen, is “someone whose life and ministry reflect the life and ministry of Jesus.”³ Put another way, a disciple of Jesus is someone who is learning to be like Jesus in *character*, while at the same time learning to do the things that Jesus does in *capacity*.

³ Mike Breen, *Multiplying Missional Leaders* (Kindle Locations 84). Breen is an English church leader, minister, author and entrepreneur. He has been an innovator in leading missional churches throughout Europe and the United States.

Even more concisely, disciples of Jesus will be known and recognized by others when they *look* like Jesus and *act* as he does.

2. **Disciple making.** For our purposes here, we have separated the concepts of *discipleship* and *disciple making*. Discipleship is about facilitating a Holy Spirit-inspired process by which a person becomes like Jesus in both character and ministry capacity. Disciple making, on the other hand, is the learned ability—aided and empowered by the Holy Spirit—wherein disciples of Jesus effectively multiply their life in Christ in someone else. This person then becomes both a disciple of Jesus and a disciple maker of others by repeating the same process multiple times. There really cannot be *faithful discipleship* that does not include active *disciple making* of others. These two are inextricably woven together in Jesus’ earthly ministry and should not be separated by followers of Jesus in the church today.

How, then, does one build a discipling culture in the local church?

The Missional Discipleship Initiative (MDI). Even when we strongly suggest that disciple making should be an organic life-on-life transformational experience, there is a methodology to this process that we suggest church leaders follow closely until it becomes part of the DNA of their local church. Even Jesus, as we saw earlier, used a methodology for his own disciple making process.

The organic piece of the process begins when someone is ready and willing to ask another person, a friend, colleague or neighbor, “Would you be interested in following me as I follow Jesus?” This is important because church services, stellar programs, and magisterially delivered sermons do not necessarily produce effective disciple makers. Only faithful disciples of Jesus produce other faithful disciples of Jesus, and we cannot delegate this sacred responsibility to our church institutions.

The Missional Discipleship Initiative (MDI) has as its main objective to coach leaders of congregations in the process of developing healthy and multiplicative disciple-making cultures. To fulfill this purpose, the MDI is introducing churches to discipleship vehicles and missional practices that are intended to aid local leaders in the process of transforming their congregations into disciple-making congregations.

Testimonials



The MDI has reinvigorated discipleship ministry in our church by creating a vehicle for life-on-life transformation, missional resourcing, and spiritual growth. We have experienced over the past year new vitality and purpose.

—**Jacob Dodson**

Pastor at Wooster Mennonite Church, Wooster, Ohio



This virtual learning process has allowed me to have a clearer picture of the changes that God is facilitating. It challenges and motivates me to fulfill the task of making disciples. It also gives me tools that, when adapted for Central America, are powerful in accomplishing the task of making disciples who in turn make more disciples. Finally, I also feel accompanied by my MDI coach who has become a mentor for our ministry here in Costa Rica.

—**José García**

Pastor of El Movimiento, Alajuela, Costa Rica



I have had a growing uneasiness about the ways we are failing to form disciples of Jesus in our church. MDI is just the vehicle our congregation needed to intentionally connect newer disciples of Jesus with more seasoned ones. We invited all our baptismal candidates to participate and it has been amazing to watch the spiritual growth, the commitment to reading Scripture, and the vulnerability of relationships that developed. MDI makes clear that baptism is not the end of the formation process, but just the beginning of disciples learning to make new disciples.

—**Paula Snyder Belousek**

Pastor at Salem Mennonite Church, Elida, Ohio



For me, MDI has provided a virtual learning community that allows me to share with other leaders, reinforcing my calling to go out and make disciples. At the same time, I love the emphasis MDI puts on the need to develop new missional leaders with a specific mindset to serve the body of Christ both in our own immediate context and everywhere else.

—**Sandra Martinez-Montes**

Pastor at Iglesia Horeb, Dallas, Texas



Time and again I heard from people, “I’ve always wanted to be a part of something like this, but I never felt like I knew enough.” The MDI provides a safe space for people to grow in faith and spiritual disciplines while also learning how to hold each other accountable in a gentle loving way. The best part is that it is so simple I found myself asking, “Why hadn’t I done this before?”

—**Jessica Schrock-Ringenberg**

*Director of Ministry Program, Hesston College,
Hesston, Kansas*



MDI is a virtual tool that connects me to the call of the Great Commission that Jesus entrusted us with. Together with other pastors who have also become my friends, we constantly learn that the church is an innovative, multiplicative movement of disciples making new disciples both inside and outside our meeting buildings. The missional church conversation that MDI facilitates is not just a fashion that pastors must adopt today; it is an effective tool for the body of Christ to fulfill its purpose in the world. The local church in which I serve has been transformed into a movement of disciples who make disciples, thus fulfilling the Great Commission of the kingdom of God.

—**Ulises Arenas**

Pastor at Iglesia Buenas Nuevas, San Juan, Texas



MDI has helped me identify tools that I can implement in my ministry to empower and release leaders into their own calling and gifts.

—**Lizzette Hernandez**

*Latino Ministries at Virginia Mennonite Missions
Harrisonburg, Virginia*



MDI has been a huge blessing both for my personal and my family life. This missional church training that invites us to make more disciples of Jesus has led us to greater family unity and communion with God. As for the congregation, missional discipleship groups have been a great tool for promoting spiritual growth and maturity.

—**Carmen Salas**

Ministerios Vizion, Brownsville, Texas



The MDI has taken our church back to the basics of discipleship. People are encountering Jesus in powerful ways on a daily and weekly basis. Sometimes it feels familiar. Sometimes it feels totally new!

—**Corben Boshart**

Minister at Zion Mennonite Church, Archbold, Ohio



MDI provides us with a virtual platform to share our lives and faith in the Spirit of Christ with other leaders. It challenges us to live in relationship with others as we are accountable to one another on how we use the missional tools we are receiving. When we prepare for “virtual learning huddles,” we spend time asking ourselves what is the Lord saying and how will I respond to his voice? Then, we are also challenged to model this spiritual practice with our own disciples in the local church.

—**Juan José Lagos**

Pastor of Iglesia Renuevo, Winston-Salem, North Carolina



When I was deciding whether to participate in the MDI and promote the use of Triads at church, I was feeling some discouragement about the level of spiritual apathy within our congregation. Then I read some research into what was called the “tipping point” to bring about change in an organization. The research suggested that when 16 percent of a group became involved in some form of change, the whole organization would change. I prayerfully considered the number of adults who regularly attended worship and calculated what 16 percent of that would be. When we launched the plan, we slightly exceeded 16 percent! After a good startup and then not putting much energy into maintaining the groups for two years, I am surprised how many are still meeting. We are just beginning to give some energy to starting some new groups. The disappointment is that our groups have not become places of evangelism and outreach as we had hoped they would. People are very hesitant to invite persons who aren’t already involved in church to join them. As our lives become busier and Sunday school classes struggle to be the effective care-giving places of the past, I am hopeful that small groups may emerge as our best means of incorporating new attendees into the church where people are cared for physically, emotionally and spiritually.

—Kurt Horst

Pastor, Whitestone Mennonite Church, Hesston, Kansas



The MDI training has helped me to evaluate and change the way I serve the Lord and his body, the church. Using small groups of disciples of Christ that in turn form more disciples of Christ has given us new light on how to fulfill the Great Commission of Jesus Christ.

—Aureliano Velazques

Pastor of Templo Alabanza, Moline, Illinois

In our local churches, we usually do well at creating teaching spaces—i.e., worship services, Bible school programs, small groups, etc. But we do less well and often fail at creating opportunities where a disciple of Jesus can invite another person to join them in following Jesus. We need to find a simple, strategic process that effectively helps us transition a new believer into becoming a disciplined and effective disciple in a reasonable time frame, or else we risk seeing that believer become a consumer of religious goods and services for life. Once discipleship is ingrained in the church's leadership style—moving from being mere head knowledge to a regular and expected lifestyle—foundations of a congregational discipling culture will have begun to take root. Soon, the theme of discipleship and disciple making will become central to the church's preaching, and weekend sermons will be sprinkled with examples of real-life disciple-making stories from which others can learn and imitate.

Missional discipleship groups (MDGs). Many churches use Sunday school sessions or small groups as the primary method for discipleship. Sometimes these gatherings function as places to deal with issues requiring pastoral care. In other contexts, they provide theological information, offer an opportunity for communal worship, or create for participants a sense of belonging.

In many cases, however, these groups do not offer a significant, life-changing experience in discipleship. It is easy for leaders in the church to assume that regular attendance or membership in these types of groups creates spiritual growth. But, often, they do not.

Furthermore, many such groups never grow or multiply! That is why we believe it is important to implement for a period of time missional discipleship groups (MDGs) within the local church, followed by an evaluation or assessment of their effectiveness with the clear intention of relaunching them by inviting larger numbers of people to participate.

MDGs are simply groups of two or three people of the same gender who meet on a weekly basis for an hour and a quarter with the sole purpose of sharing together in a meaningful discipleship experience. MDGs can meet on any day of the week, at any time, and in any place. When they do meet, they seek to accomplish three principal things: Scripture reading, individual and communal prayer, and accountability to one another.

In launching an MDG in a local congregation, it is important to have the following key players: an “implementing leader,” a number of “facilitators,” a group of “committed” people, and the recruitment of “new” individuals who are hungry for God.

- 1. The implementing leader.** This local person—often a pastor in the congregation—is in charge of providing oversight to the MDI implementing process. The primary responsibility of this person is to assure that discipleship is actually taking place within the MDGs. The MDI is meant to be—as stated earlier—a reproducible training tool. This means that some of the implementing leaders could eventually become MDI coaches once they have experienced for themselves Level 1 (Basic) stage of the MDI process.
- 2. The facilitator.** One of the roles of the implementing leader is to invite certain people to serve as facilitators in using MDGs as a vehicle for discipleship formation. This person will be invited because he or she is hungry for God and has the willingness, time, and gifts for walking with two other people in the discipleship experience over a nine-month period. The facilitator is the only person recruited by the implementing leader.
- 3. The committed.** The majority of Christians in a local congregation fit the profile of a “committed” person—one who has been part of the church for many years, who enjoys and actively participates in the life of the faith community, who contributes financially to the church’s work, and who, in general terms, seems happy with the church’s mission, vision, and overall direction. This person is not, however, actively involved in intentional disciple making. In most instances, they have never, in fact, been intentionally disciplined themselves! Such a person is invited by the facilitator to participate in the discipleship process to learn more about how to make disciples of Jesus. It is a clear expectation from the outset that the committed person will eventually repeat the same discipleship experience with someone else.
- 4. The new.** In addition, there is the new person who is either new to the congregation or who has never been part of a church. This

person is not yet a disciple of Jesus, but is hungry enough for God that they are willing to participate in this discipling experience. The new person is invited by either the facilitator or the committed person to participate in their MDG.

Virtual learning huddles (VLHs). In addition to the process outlined above, a virtual learning huddle is formed, composed of three to five implementing leaders who are actively carrying out the MDI within their context. Together, these leaders create a virtual learning community experience via videoconferencing with the purpose of offering each other emotional, spiritual and logistical support as they go through the implementation process. A VLH is facilitated by a trained MDI coach who uses an Internet-based learning platform to deliver content to implementing leaders in preparation for their biweekly MDI virtual session. Virtual learning huddles meet for as long as the MDI learning process is taking place.

The Missional Discipleship Initiative (MDI)—a five-step process

Recruiting. In the month of May, MDI begins the recruitment process for new participating implementing leaders and congregations in a fresh cycle of discipleship formation that begins every year on Sept. 1. Once on board, implementing leaders begin to pray and think about potential facilitators—anywhere from three to 15—who will participate in this learning experience.

Training. After all the implementing leaders and facilitators have been recruited, they are invited to an hour-long online training appointment the first week in August. During the virtual training session, they receive key information on MDG small-group dynamics, the use of MDG cards, ideas for the recruitment of the other participants in their groups—the committed and the new—and the multiplication of MDGs.

Launching. All participating leaders launch their MDGs on the same weekend—the first weekend in September. To increase awareness of this initiative in the church, we suggest that they mark the moment with a special celebration before the whole congregation. Leaders in

their respective congregations will make sure to pray for all facilitators and the committed persons that have been invited to this discipleship experience. From this point onward, all MDGs will begin meeting on a weekly basis for the following nine months, and VLHs will begin biweekly meetings with an MDI coach.

Implementing. The center of action during the implementing phase gravitates around two important groups—the MDGs and the VLHs. During the nine-month discipling process, all MDGs will meet weekly for an hour and fifteen minutes. These groups, as stated earlier, are made up of two or three people and can meet on any day of the week, at any time, and in any place of their choosing. When they do meet, they work together at the three-point agenda suggested on the MDG cards—accountability, Scripture reading, and individual and communal prayer. To accomplish this, the facilitator leads participants in answering the five key questions also found on the MDG card.

Weekly MDG meetings

Agenda:

- Accountability
- Scripture reading
- Prayer

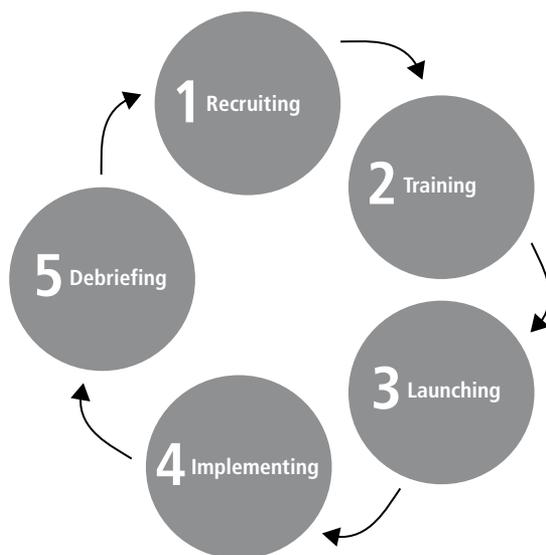
5 key questions:

1. Where have you seen God at work this week?
2. What did you hear God say to you this week during your prayer time?
3. What have you learned from the assigned Scripture reading this week?
4. How have you shared the love of Jesus with others this week?
5. Where have you fallen short this week?

Adapted from Neil Cole's Life Transformation Groups Cards ©1999. www.CMAResources.org

The VLH will begin meeting the same week that the MDGs are launched. These sessions are typically one hour in length and are done on a biweekly basis during which time three important things take place:

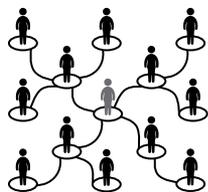
1. Verbal reports are given on the MDG implementation progress.
2. Discussion takes place around a reading assignment, generally concerning a missional tool to be applied during the two weeks to follow.
3. The time is bathed in prayer and mutual encouragement.



Debriefing. After nine months of continued implementation of the MDI, leaders are asked to stop for a necessary debriefing time. During a VLH session, each implementing leader is asked to assess in a few words the most significant learnings that have taken place during the implementation process.

The three learning levels of the Missional Discipleship Initiative

The MDI implementation process includes three different levels that last three months each for a total of nine months. These levels are:



LEVEL 1 or Basic (Sept.–Nov.): Building a Discipling Culture. Level 1, described in considerable detail in the preceding text, focuses on how to develop a solid culture of disciple making within the local church. Missional discipleship groups are introduced and implemented along with

a number of missional tools that could enhance the implementing leader's understanding of what it means to be missional.



LEVEL 2 or Intermediate (Jan.–Mar.):

Developing Missional Leaders. Level 2 pays attention to how we develop new leaders in the local church with a clear orientation toward God’s reconciling mission. The goal is to reflect with implementing leaders both theologically and practically on the importance of developing a solid conviction for leadership development in the local church, to learn how to manage church culture, and to initiate essential practices for effective leadership development.



LEVEL 3 or Advanced (Apr.–Jun.):

Church as movement. Level 3 deals directly with the idea that what Jesus came to inaugurate was not the church per se, but the kingdom of God. Implementing leaders learn about the reproducible nature of God’s kingdom and about the importance of leaving behind an “addition mentality” to embrace a “multiplication” one. They also learn about “movemental” thinking principles that would help them mobilize all God’s people, in God’s way, and for God’s purposes.

A few concluding remarks ... just to be clear

The Missional Discipleship Initiative (MDI) described in these pages is not the *only*, nor necessarily the *best* or most *perfect* model for doing disciple-making formation. Our concern here is much less about the instrument that is used than about the importance of adopting some kind of intentional approach to move beyond *simply making disciples*—as absolutely important as that is—to the goal of calling forth and equipping disciples to become themselves *disciple makers*.

MDI has proven to be an effective tool in that process, and if you have been made curious to know more about it, please feel free to contact us for more information at MarvinL@MennoniteMission.net or visit our website at www.MennoniteMission.net/MDI. If, on the other hand, you have discovered other methods for accomplishing this kingdom goal as commissioned and modeled by Jesus, we would be equally interested in knowing more about them and learning how to become more effective in “obeying all things that Jesus has commanded us” (from Matthew 28:20).

Questions for reflection and discussion

1. What struck you most in reading this booklet?
2. Have you ever been inspired or shaped by someone like Ed King, described in the opening pages of this essay? Who was that person for you? And how did your life change because of meeting them?
3. In Matthew 4:18-20, Jesus addresses two fishermen brothers, Peter and Andrew, and says, “Come, follow me, and I will send you out to fish for people.” Jesus does not simply ask people to *follow* him, but to do so with a very specific and purposeful activity in mind. Do you think it is possible to faithfully follow Jesus, to be his true disciple, if you are not “fishing for others?”
4. Have you ever been a part of a small group designed not only to encourage members in becoming better disciples, but more specifically to equip them in becoming *disciple makers*? How does this latter focus change the nature, identity, and primary intent of such a group?
5. What does your church or ministry do to train people in continuing the work of Jesus to disciple others?
6. How do you react to these three statements?
 - “The church exists by mission, just as fire exists by burning.” (Emil Brunner)
 - “The church that is not evangelizing ... does not truly believe the gospel.” (Wilbert Shenk)
 - “A church which is not an evangelizing church is either not yet or no longer the church, or only a dead church, itself in need of renewal by evangelization.” (Karl Barth)
7. Imagine yourself sitting at a bus stop or in a doctor’s office and you have just finished reading this booklet. Someone sitting close by asks you, “So, what are you reading?” And you reply, “Well, the title is, ‘Not just disciples, but disciple makers.’” Perplexed, they ask, “What is *that* supposed to mean?” And you say, “_____.”

For further reading

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*Available in Spanish.

Not just disciples, but disciple makers

“Biblical discipleship,” says Marvin Lorenzana, “is only complete when a faithful disciple of Jesus learns—in an intentional and relational way—how to make *another* faithful disciple of Jesus” (p. 3). Not many church members really believe or practice this, of course, despite the fact that Jesus actually called the very first disciples to leave their fishing nets and follow him, so that he could send them out to “fish for people” (Matthew 4:19).

This booklet raises important questions about the difference between being *disciples of Jesus* and being *Jesus’ disciple makers*. Try out the questions on page 21 with your small group, Sunday school class, or ministry team. They are certain to generate a lively conversation and, potentially, a call to action!



Marvin Lorenzana was born in Tegucigalpa, Honduras’ capital city. In 1994, he felt called by God to become a missionary to the country with the world’s third largest Hispanic population after Mexico and Spain—the United States of America! He is an ordained minister licensed in Virginia Mennonite Conference. Lorenzana has a BS in management and organizational development from Eastern Mennonite University, an MDiv from Eastern Mennonite Seminary, and a DMin from Asbury

Theological Seminary. He currently works for Mennonite Mission Network as director for Discipleship Initiatives, where he serves as a coach for church leaders interested in developing a culture of intentional disciple making within the local congregation.

For more information about the Missional Discipleship Initiative (MDI), write **MarvinL@MennoniteMission.net** or visit our website at **www.MennoniteMission.net/MDI**.

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