


Leading Maranatha Reformed Church of Christ beyond hundred years through serving and cell groups

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This article had as a point of departure, the fact that the most important component of church life and work, was its members, whose edification and enablement were of vital importance. A background was proffered to help the reader acquaint themselves with the church circumstances. An important question in this article was, what would revive and sustain the growth momentum in the 100-year-old plus Maranatha Reformed Church of Christ (MRCC), going forward? I identified the leader's key performance area as serving God and those who needed his or her gifts, leadership and purpose. This article followed a literary research approach in which various literary sources, especially on the MRCC, servant leadership, practical theology, and cell groups were studied. The aim was to find a solution to the problem of membership decline in this church. Some exploration, interpretation, discernment and discovery was done and achieved, leading to the required solution. A brief definition and discussion of the act of leading through serving and of cell groups were presented. It further, expressed the need to establish and utilise cell groups, as a necessary tool through which the MRCC could attain and sustain needed growth. Having discussed servant leadership, cell groups and their importance, I drew some conclusions.

Contribution: This article makes a meaningful contribution to the MRCC, other mainline churches and church growth theoretical studies, by uncovering the resilience and dynamism for church growth residing in servant leadership principles and practices and the utilisation of cell groups.

Keywords: leading through serving; servant leadership; hundred-year-old; celebration; church growth; cell or small groups.

Introduction

Hundred years of existence and service to God and the South African society are a milestone, for which members should profusely thank the Lord and duly celebrate. This article aimed to present servant leadership and the utilisation of cell groups as helpful drivers for efficient and effective ministry of the 100-year-old Maranatha Reformed Church of Christ (MRCC), going forward.

This article was premised on the fact that while ordinary church members were considered an important component of church life and work, this church has not found an appropriate leadership philosophy and style as well as meaningful strategy to guide them effectively towards future successful worship and service to God and his people. Serving God and God's people was identified as the key performance area of the leader in the MRCC, beyond the church's 100 years of existence.

It will be clear in the background section that the MRCC membership has declined and continues to do so. The important question in this research is, what will revive and sustain the growth momentum in the 100-year-old MRCC, going forward? Indeed, what does the MRCC need to do in order to efficiently and effectively make disciples and grow the church?

Osmer (2008) proposes a model of practical theological interpretation, with four tasks, namely:

1. *The descriptive-empirical task, which asks the question, 'What is going on?'*
2. *The interpretive task, which asks the question, 'Why is it going on?'*

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3. *The normative task, which asks the question, 'What ought to be going on?'*
4. *The pragmatic task, which asks the question, 'How might we respond?'. (p. 4)*

These tasks and their specific questions can greatly help church leaders to understand, interpret and resolve episodes, situations and contexts that confront them in ministry (Osmer 2008:38). While this may not be the only model that can be used in determining and finding solutions to ministry challenges, I call on the MRCC church leaders, ordained and non-ordained, to systematically study the episodes, situations and contexts our church ministry finds itself in. The decline in church membership numbers is our church's main challenge (this seems to be what is going on).

The background section, provides a brief situation sketch and thus, briefly answering Osmer's first and second questions and implicitly, the third namely, what is going on? Why is it going on? and what ought to be going on? (Osmer 2008:4). The question that needs our focussed attention is to my mind, and in the context of this brief article, how might we respond?

It is my established assumption that the MRCC has to recognise ordinary members as an important component of church life and work, edify and enable members as vital to church leadership, embrace the act of leading through serving and establish and utilise cell or small groups to serve as a necessary tool through which the MRCC can attain and sustain needed growth

Background

Maranatha Reformed Church of Christ is one of South Africa's many mainline churches. This church was officially established on 12 May 1923, 406 years after the birth of the Reformation in West Germany, in what is today's known as the KwaZulu-Natal province. At the beginning, the church seemed headed for phenomenal growth as its pioneers such as Rev Sililo Andrew Mlaba and Rev Stephanus Phillipus Mpanza selflessly worked hardest (see Banda 1996:93). The church soon spread to the then Transvaal and Orange Free State provinces (Manala 2006:55). The establishment of more congregations, both in the then Natal and Orange Free State provinces was clear evidence of serious mission work by the church's pioneers and succeeding ministers. However, in the mid-1980s (only about 9 years after the church's independence, attained in 1977), the church seemed to have reached a point of stagnation and decline in terms of membership growth.

The church started to do some introspection at its various meetings, in search of reasons for the stagnation and certain decline, without reaching any outcome. The MRCC's growth further declined in the 1990s, which was exacerbated by the church's 1991 synod's decision to allow the church's ministers to apply for and accept work in extra-ecclesial institutions,

which resulted in the absence of ministers in congregations during weekdays (HKSA 1991:60). That decision was taken following the commencement of the gradual decrease of the subsidy from Netherdutch Reformed Church of Africa in 1989 – decrease that is still continuing to this day. Currently, many ministers of this church form a good number of chaplains both in the South African National Defence Force (SANDF) and South African Police Service (SAPS). Some find themselves in universities and other institutions. The concern of the MRCC about the decline in church membership is a natural one in such a situation.

Church growth should indeed, as desired by the MRCC above, be the goal of each and every church. The church's task involves actively evangelising with the aim of leading people who do not know Jesus Christ to the knowledge of and faith in him as well as of multiplying the church membership.

The Maranatha Reformed Church of Christ's members as important component of church life and work

The Greek word for church is *ecclesia*, which means those who are called out, from the verb *ekkalew*. This description incorporates all those who have heard and believed the proclaimed gospel, not only the ordained or clergy. According to the Church Order of the MRCC, Article 1.8, members of congregations are those who are:

1. *minor children or dependents of members of the congregation;*
2. *those who have been accepted into the congregation through baptism;*
3. *those who became members through confirmation;*
4. *those who are admitted from other congregations of the MRCC and/or other churches (MRCC 2018:4).*

The above MRCC Church Order article on membership is, however, silent in respect of mission work and or evangelism as means of recruiting new members. This reveals a serious challenge and disobedience of the MRCC to Christ's Great Commission.

Members of the MRCC have entitlements and responsibilities (MRCC 2018:4–5). I have noted above, that the MRCC has lost its former growth momentum and reached a point of decline in membership. Ensor (2022:1) points to a common cause of membership decline in churches, saying:

A common reason churches have difficulty finding new members is the confusion of what it means to be a church member. Most people do not see church membership as necessary anymore, but churches have the responsibility to educate individuals on the benefits of membership.

The MRCC is facing a similar need to educate members on the benefits of membership and outline to them, their personal and collective significance in church life and work.

The MRCC also needs to consider and embark on intentional mission work and/or evangelism. Consideration of evangelism

is a must do for the MRCC, if it is to avoid serious consequences of ignoring this dynamic vehicle of church life, as Cho and Hostetler (1981), aver:

The human body needs to renew and replenish itself constantly or it will die. That requirement is just as true for the Church, the body of Christ. Therefore, one of the needs of a dynamic and growing church life is evangelism. (p. 55)

Edification and enablement of members as vital to church leadership

The importance of members in the MRCC is buttressed by the Church Order (2018a:70), in article 9 entitled, *The priesthood of all the believers*. This doctrine was introduced to Protestantism by Martin Luther. Fesko (n.d.:1) (The gospel coalition) highlights the differences between medieval and the Protestant understandings regarding the way God works through the church, thus:

The medieval church taught that God works exclusively through a select class of priests as they administered the seven sacraments of the church: baptism, the Eucharist (Lord's Supper), confirmation, penance, extreme unction, marriage, and holy orders. Protestants, on the other hand, believe that all people in the church are priests who, in the language of the 16th century reformer, Martin Luther, belong to the priesthood of all believers.

Dreyer (2020) asserts the importance of the priesthood of believers and explains the difference between ordained clergy and non-ordained believers, saying:

The priesthood of believers could be regarded as one of the central principles of the 16th-century Reformation. The doctrine asserts that all believers have equal access to God through Christ, the only high priest, and thus do not need any other priestly mediator. The implication of this doctrine is that all Christians are equal before God. Ordained clergy differ from non-ordained believers only in terms of function (ministerium) and not in terms of status (officium). (p. 3)

It is clear, according to this teaching, that there is no question of hierarchy between ordained and non-ordained believers in terms of access and service to Christ. This teaching promotes equality of believers and motivates them to active service in the church of Christ.

The MRCC also embraces the priesthood of all believers (MRCC 2018:71). Here, we are made to understand that there is no distinction in the status, importance and responsibility between ordinary church members and the clergy. In view of the need to give church members access to and ability to fulfil the priesthood of all believers, the MRCC Church Order (MRCC 2018:71) art. 9.1 provides: '... the Church trains and equips office bearers and members by means of: preaching; catechesis; Bible study; courses offered by meetings of office bearers; church institutions; periodicals and church publications'. In art. 9.2, the Church Order sketches the context within which the above training can take place proficiently. It says: 'The church institutes service groups in which members join hands in the provision of spiritual, social, political, psychological, and other services'. It is, thus, in small groups that the

equipping and church building tasks can be carried out proficiently.

To build and maintain good health of the church is not an easy proposition and thus needs efficient membership training for edification and enablement. The training and church-growing tasks need committed and hands-on leadership. The relevant leadership style for such tasks is without doubt, the leading through serving one, as it will be pointed out below. This is the case, because as stated by Greenleaf (ed. Spears 1998:1), leading through serving instils in the led, personal growth, behavioural health, wisdom, freedom, autonomy and servanthood. A closer reflection on the act of leading through serving is called for.

Leading through serving, defined and discussed

It is important in this section to reflect on and briefly discuss the act of leading through serving or what is commonly referred to as servant leadership. This reflection and discussion do, however, not make any claim to providing extensive treatise but only broad strokes articulation of servant leadership, according to some relevant works.

Robert Greenleaf coined and introduced the concept 'servant as leader' to the leadership discourse in the 1970s. Inspired by Hermann Hess' fiction, *A journey to the East*, with servant, Leo as its central figure but also a natural leader, Greenleaf coined his important 1970 dictum about his newly discovered leadership concept, focusing on prioritisation of serving others' needs, namely:

The servant-leader is servant first. It begins with the natural feeling that one wants to serve. Then conscious choice brings one to aspire to lead. The best test is: do those served grow as persons; do they, while being served, become healthier, wiser, freer, more autonomous, more likely themselves to become servants? And what is the effect on the least in society; will they benefit, or at least, not be further deprived?. (Greenleaf 1977:6, ed. Spears 1998:1)

Servant leadership is founded on a totally new moral principle of humility and mutuality. The leader needs to display the spirit of a trustworthy servant. Greenleaf (1977) attests to this fact, saying:

A new moral principle is emerging, which holds that the only authority deserving one's allegiance is that which is freely and knowingly granted by the led to the leader in response to, and in proportion to, the clearly evident servant stature of the leader. (p. 3)

The basis of this is true humility and mutual respect between the leader and the led and most of all the desire to serve.

According to servant leadership, the leader needs to display the spirit of a trustworthy servant. Greenleaf (1977) teaches us:

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The basis of this is true compassion, humility and respect to the led and, most importantly, the desire to serve. Mandela (2011:6) states important qualities of a servant leader: 'Honesty, sincerity, simplicity, humility, pure generosity, absence of vanity, readiness to serve others – qualities which are within easy reach of every soul – are the foundation of one's spiritual life'.

According to Blachard (1991:117), servant leadership promotes increased service to others, all-inclusive work, community, sharing and independent decision making. This is important for the church that desperately needs growth. Huff (2022) propounds servant leadership role in the church as leadership development, stewardship, teaching and achievement of ecclesial goals.

Servant leadership, thus, strips some leaders who like the limelight, of their pretentiousness, which borders on a superiority complex that pushes followers to the periphery. It reminds such leaders of their common humanity with those they are supposed to lead. It actually calls on all leaders to the realisation of the *imago Dei*, in all men and women and which demands respect, love and care for all. For this reason, Vaill (1998:xi) points out: 'It combines a concern for getting things done with attention to the needs of those who are getting things done. There are not two functions; there is only one – servanthood'.

Ntamere (Thakkar) thus aptly notes:

As the name implies, service is crucial in servant leadership theory. It is challenging for some leaders to transcend their selfish ends to give first priority to the needs of their subordinates. Servant leadership model emphasizes stewardship, quality service, and ethical principles in the application of power because they realize that the inherent power that emanates from serving others can move individuals and organizations beyond what they are capable of accomplishing, i.e., achievement of excellent results. (2018:246)

Leadership, especially in the church is therefore, not about self-importance or self-interest of a leader but about service to God and others. Van Rensburg, therefore, states:

Leadership intent is to create a better future for and with others. It is internally motivated and comes from a sense of responsibility to make positive differences in life. It is in principal [sic] about serving others with your own talents and your potential. At the same time the leader liberates other's spirit and potential. (2007:2)

Leadership is, thus, primarily about a deep desire and action of an individual, in the direction of improving human and/or organisational life and functioning. Manala (2010:5) is therefore right in stating that 'The central assumption here (meaning in Christian leadership as servant leadership) is that the pastor is, and must act as a servant', not as boss. This

position is also articulated by Du Plessis and Nkambule (2020) in the abstract of their article, saying

A person who has a heart for people and serves them whilst leading them practices servant leadership. Servant leaders are not motivated by attaining higher positions but by serving people. (p. 1)

The importance of leadership thus resides in the self-emptying of a leader for the sake of his/her mission and that of others, upon whom they have leadership responsibility. This kenotic attitude and action is the force that binds together, the followers with both the leader and the organisational purpose. It is for this reason that Manala (2014) postulates:

Servant leadership values and develops people, builds community, promotes the practice of authenticity, providing leadership for the good of followers and the sharing of power and status for the common good of each individual, the total organisation and those served by the organisation. The serving, caring, sharing and developing conduct of the leader are central in the servant leadership model. (p. 254)

In this sense, one is reminded of our Lord Jesus Christ's own leadership philosophy, attitude and action as clearly stated in Matthew 20:26–28 and Mark 10:43–45, when he told his disciples:

This, however, is not the way it shall be among you. If one of you wants to be great, he must be the servant of the rest; and if one of you wants to be first, he must be your slave – like the Son of Man, who did not come to be served, but to serve and to give his life to redeem many people. (GN B)

In John 13:4–17, Jesus demonstrates his unmistakable humility and desire to serve, by washing his disciples' feet. This is the way Jesus spells out in word and deed, an important principle and practice of Christian leadership, for Christian leaders to follow. Here, Jesus rejects position mongering, which he clearly replaces with the great desire to serve. In this regard, Barclay (1974) points out the core difference between world greatness and Christian greatness, saying:

Out in the world there was the Roman governor with his retinue; the eastern potentate with his slaves; the man of affairs with his staff of attendant slaves. The world counts them great. But in the Christian assessment, service alone is the badge of greatness; greatness does not consist in commanding others to do things for us; greatness consists in doing things for others; and the greater the service, the greater the honour. (p. 256)

Barclay (1974:267) states further, to emphasise the value of service to the world: 'The world needs people whose ideal is service – that is to say the world needs people who have realized what sound sense Jesus spoke.'

Leading through serving is at the heart of the revolutionary or radical transformation in and of leadership understanding, as articulated by Jesus. Leading through serving can therefore, be rightly and unapologetically categorised, as Christian leadership, as Ntamere (Thakkar 2018:246) does, saying: 'Servant leadership is rooted in Scripture' (see also

Wong & Page 2003:1). The essential element in serving others, which fosters high performance in followers or members, is its ability to imbue the social relationships within the group with trust, especially affective trust as well as with liking (see Saleem et al. 2020:11).

Saleem et al. further state the following evidence of the motivation power of servant leadership in generating affective trust:

Considering the different potential dimensions of trust in servant leadership, our findings suggest that servant leaders more effectively generate affective trust in subordinates, and this affective trust mediates the relationship of servant leadership and OCB [organizational citizenship behavior] and performance of subordinates. (2020:12)

Wong and Page (2003:1) also note importance of servant leadership in church growth, saying: 'Denominations and churches see SL not only as the biblical model for leadership, but also as a rally cry for recruiting and training Christian leaders'. The most likely context within which servant leadership can impact church life and work is the framework of cell groups. It is undeniable therefore that the MRCC, with its utilisation of part time pastors, needs the services of servant leaders in conjunction with employment of cell or small groups. This article therefore also gives a brief attention to the phenomenon of cell groups as a necessary tool through which the MRCC can attain and sustain needed growth.

Cell groups as a necessary tool for attaining and sustaining church growth and efficient functioning

The cell group strategy has been hailed as one of the best means of achieving quantitative and qualitative growth. Many churches that experience healthy growth both in South Africa and abroad, for instance, the Methodist Church, have from time immemorial used the cell groups. I gained this knowledge from a number of students from the Methodist tradition whom I supervised at master's and doctoral degree levels.

This section intends highlighting importance of cell groups in the healthy growth of the church and to suggest the use of this strategy in the MRCC. This should, however, not be construed as something I consider to be the panacea of and a magical wand for the resolution of the church's challenges. I suggest this as a humble contribution of a concerned church member and minister. I know the cell group model may sound foreign to the ears of MRCC members, though adopted by this church's 2015 synod (MRCC 2015:42). Implementation, however, remains evasive. There is therefore a need for some explanation of the phenomenon of cell groups. Below is an attempt to explain the phenomenon without any claim to expertise on the subject.

In their seminal work, *Successful home cell groups*, Cho and Hostetler (1981:v & vi), present what they call God's real

secret for church growth, namely home cell groups. According to Cho and Hostetler (1981:49, 50), home cell groups decisively solve the church growth-disabling spectator posture of many members, by providing an opportunity for every member to belong, become involved and committed. Using the term 'small' group, Comiskey (2009) says:

I define a small group as a group of 3 to 15 people who meet weekly outside the church building for the purpose of evangelism, community, and spiritual growth with the goal of making disciples who make disciples that result in multiplication. (p. 9)

This group needs to always stay open to new entrants/recruits.

Bucknell (2006) states:

Cell groups – Nurturing groups of 8–12 where regular worship, intercessory prayer, accountability and fellowship around God's Word binds individuals into a cohesive unit. Here, these individuals can use their spiritual gifts, receive support, encourage one another and seek to bring others to share their joy.

A cell group is thus, a small organic and actively worshipping, fellowshiping, evangelising, discipling, sharing and compassionate group of committed Christians, gathering outside the church in members' homes. I suppose Finnell's (Bucknell 2006) presentation accommodates most of the above. It states:

Cells are the organism of the body of believers [Christians] in small groups for the purpose of worship, experiencing God, ministering to one another and ministering to and evangelizing the community. (p. 23)

The above definition gives broad identifying features and purposes of the cell groups, which are depicted as central to church life, especially to church growth. A cell group is therefore intentional (Lawson 1998:57). It is, however, important to note that not every small group in the church qualifies to be given the status of a cell group. Cell Group Guideline PHCSA Evangelism Outreach Ministries (2018) highlights the following main difference between small group and a cell group, namely: 'A cell group multiplies while a small group may not'. In its biological sense, 'a cell is a living, growing organism that multiplies itself over and over again'. It is for this very reason that the church growth movement uses the term 'cell' group to emphasise its central role of multiplication. As an example of this, Cho and Hostetler (1981:60) relate the success of one cell group after 4 years of its establishment, saying: 'Today that cell group has grown to 130 cells with 2000 members in Inchon'. Cell groups are a real driver of church growth and intimacy. Additional distinctive characteristics of a cell group are also highlighted, namely:

- A Commitment to evangelism
- A Commitment to nurture and disciple believers
- A Commitment to develop leaders
- A Commitment to multiplication, so as to fulfil the Great Commission (Cell Group Guideline PHCSA Outreach Ministries 2018)

The use of cell groups is scriptural. The Scriptures, especially Ephesians 4:11 & 12 and Acts 2:46 & 47 as well as Exodus 18:17–27 motivated Pastor Cho to conclude that the exceptionally growing church, can be served through utilisation of cell groups. He was convinced that the conventional Sunday only church service was actually an impediment to carrying out effective ministry (Cho 2015:110, 111 & 113). What triggered the phenomenal growth in Cho's church was trusting the laity, i.e., women deacons with some ministerial responsibilities (see Cho 2015:112). Difficult as it was for Cho to convince male members, about forming cell groups, he ultimately cautiously turned to women for cell group leadership under his personal supervision, where this important idea found traction (Cho 2015:123). The important issue about cell groups was their positive impact on the life of the church. Cho (2015:131) avers: 'The cell groups grew and multiplied, which impacted the church growth. The cell groups were a role model of what a successful ministry should be'. Explaining the positive functioning of cell groups, Cho (2015:131) states: 'When it became large enough, the cell group would split into two new cell groups and separate. That way it multiplied like body cells undergoing mitosis or meiosis'. The growth motif emanating from the utilisation of cell groups is quite evident from Pastor Cho's use of the above analogy of body cells.

The growth of the church was so monumental that Cho (2015) expressed himself thus:

The church grew to the point I couldn't estimate its size. We hadn't been keeping count on the number of members, but an official tabulation we did in 1964 showed that our church had 2400 members; how many we had now we did not know, we only knew it was far beyond that number. We attributed the growth to the active cell groups – but none of us knew the exact number or even bothered to keep track. (pp. 131,132)

The news of such enormous growth soon spread to large parts of the world, which made Pastor Cho the envy of many, leading to his frequent invitations to conferences to present the cell group magic.

For a church that desperately needs growth, the cell group is an absolute necessity as its very focus is multiplication, evangelism, nurture, discipling, development of leaders and commitment to the Great Commission. The MRCC undoubtedly needs to adopt, train and employ servant leaders to guide the church corporately and particularly, constitute and activate cell or small groups. Manala and Dreyer (2001:1110), recommend to the Hervormde Kerk in Suidelike (Current MRCC), the establishment and employment of ward service groups to engender healthy Christian interaction for effective poverty alleviation, which proves the envisaged efficiency of cell groups.

With its most of the time, absent ministers, cell groups are apt in keeping the MRCC membership together and active in acts of 'worship, experiencing God, ministering to one another and ministering to and evangelizing the community' as (Bucknell 2006:23) pointed out. Koskela (2013:166) makes an

enlightening statement about the value of the class meeting or cell group in the context of the Methodist Church of Southern Africa (MCSA): 'While a traveling preacher would only occasionally be present at any one location, class leaders provided crucial ministerial oversight that helped to sustain the connection'. As indicated above, MRCC ministers are most of the time absent from the flock, and cell groups would be very helpful. I further agree with Galloway's (Lawson 1998:57–58) stated reasons every church [especially the MRCC] needs small groups, namely:

- They provide multiple points of entry into the church;
- They provide a very effective form of evangelism;
- They are the only way to truly care for people;
- They accelerate the spiritual growth of individuals and the church;
- They properly shift the work of the church to the people.

How vital! All these point to the priority that the cell group system gives to individual lay members as an important component of congregational and ecclesial life and work and the best way to accomplish ecclesial responsibilities. Cell groups undoubtedly give effect to the teaching of the ministry of the laity.

Home cell groups were activated as early as the 1st century Christian church via the use of house churches or cell groups (see Neighbour cited by Lawson 1998:59 and Fesko n.d.).

Alongside mother value namely, the centrality of Jesus Christ, the following values of cell groups are worth mentioning. In a cell:

- **Every member serves:** We are the body of Christ. We have all received gifts and talents that the Lord Jesus wants to develop in us for the benefit of the whole church. No one has been created to be a spectator. Cell groups become the place where we can all grow in faith and can use our gifts.
- **Every member grows:** To be a Christian is a lifelong growing relationship with Jesus. The cell group is the place where new members can be *discipled* and where all members can grow to maturity and in Jesus' plan for their lives.
- **Sacrificial love:** The sacrificial love that Jesus demonstrated (Jn 1 3:16), which is also at our disposal through the Holy Spirit Who lives in us, is an important element of cell life. Self-sacrifice binds the cell together. It is not about what you can get out of cell life, but what you can contribute.
- **Fellowship:** A cell group is more than a gathering! It is a small group of people who look to each other and care for one another. It is a place to love others and where others love you. A cell group is like a family. We learn to trust one another, to be open and honest, to help others and to receive help and to build each other up and develop good friendships.
- **Evangelism and multiplication:** Research shows that more than 70% of all Christians came to Christ through a friend. Because cells meet in the homes of the members,

they form an important means for our unbelieving friends to see how Christians interact with each other and what it means to be a Christian (Administrator in Bulletin – Deliverance Church Kasarani – Zimmerman 2017).

A cell group needs to ensure that it remains open to new people and never to exclusively focus inwardly (see Comiskey 1996). The cell group members are challenged to reach out to outsiders and show the love of Jesus (Comiskey 1996). The main goal of a cell group is to grow, to develop leadership and to multiply into two new cell groups (see Cho 2015:131). Weekly meetings of cell groups for mutual edification, worship and evangelism are essential. Apart from these meetings, cell group members can as Motloba indicates, communicate continually throughout the week, using cell phone technology. They can form a chat group through which to keep contact throughout the week (see Motloba 2016:156). This can indeed keep the cell group members mutually enriched and ready for their weekly encounter. The social media policy of the MRCC (MRCC 2018) would, in this regard, provide guidelines for use.

Conclusion

This article presented a background to briefly sketch the problem context of the MRCC. The MRCC's challenge of membership decline was highlighted in light of Osmer's (2008) model of practical theological interpretation, with four tasks. Also highlighted in the background was the MRCC's desperate need for quantitative and qualitative growth. Following Osmer's (2008:4) model of practical theological interpretation, with four tasks was helpful in facilitating realisation of the needed pragmatic action the church needs to take. The analysed data overwhelmingly indicated that servant leadership and the utilisation of cell groups would positively stimulate, initiate and sustain healthy church growth, within the MRCC. I argued and confirmed that servant leadership and cell group utilisation would undoubtedly produce the needed resilience and dynamism for church growth and efficient functioning.

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M.J.M. declares that they are the sole author of this research article.

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