

# EXTENDING YOUR CHURCH TO MORE THAN ONE PLACE

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A Field Report on the Emerging Multi-Site Movement

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*by Warren Bird*

LEADERSHIP  NETWORK®

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**"THE MULTI-SITE CHURCH IS  
A PHENOMENON THAT YOU WILL NO  
DOUBT BE HEARING ABOUT  
IN THE FUTURE."**

**– LEADERSHIP JOURNAL, SPRING 2003**



**Multi-site ventures have changed the context for ministry...**

A growing number of churches today ... continue as one congregation with one staff, one treasury, one membership roster, one governing board and one name (it may be Bethany East and Bethany West, or Trinity North and Trinity South), but with three or four or five or six or seven or eight worship services every weekend.

"Several ... multi-site congregations have discovered that **their off-campus ministries are the most effective channels for reaching skeptics, agnostics, non-believers and inquirers at the very earliest stage of their faith journey.** ... And ... from a financial perspective, this may be the most cost-effective approach to evangelism"<sup>2</sup> – Lyle E. Schaller



LYLE SCHALLER

**Meet Some of the Pioneers.** The following insights are designed to help church leaders who are looking for fresh ways to reach more people and different people for Christ. If your church is exploring or experimenting with alternative venues such as digital church, extension sites, video-café congregations, multiple campuses, satellite ministries, or other variations that go beyond your main worship area or main campus, then keep reading. You will find much help in this material.

**IF YOUR CHURCH IS  
EXPLORING ... VIDEO  
CAFÉ CONGREGATIONS,  
MULTIPLE CAMPUSES ...  
OR OTHER VARIATIONS ...  
KEEP READING!**

The research behind this report draws on the experience of twelve pioneering churches selected to participate in a Multi-site Leadership Community.

These leadership communities are sponsored by Leadership Network, a Dallas-based foundation whose mission is to accelerate the effectiveness of the Church by identifying, connecting, and resourcing strategic leaders. The member churches are:

- Chartwell Baptist Church**, suburb of Toronto, ON, [www.chartwellchurch.org](http://www.chartwellchurch.org)
- Christ the King Community Church**, north of Seattle, WA, [www.ckonline.com](http://www.ckonline.com)
- Community Christian Church**, suburb of Chicago, IL, [www.communitychristian.org](http://www.communitychristian.org)
- Fellowship Bible Church**, Little Rock, AR, [www.fbclr.org](http://www.fbclr.org)
- Grace Community Church**, Tyler, TX, [www.gcc.org](http://www.gcc.org)
- Gulf Breeze United Methodist Church**, just outside Pensacola, FL, [www.gbumc.org](http://www.gbumc.org)
- Life Church**, suburb of Oklahoma City, OK, [www.LifeChurch.tv](http://www.LifeChurch.tv)
- New Life Community Church**, Chicago, IL, [www.newlifechicago.com](http://www.newlifechicago.com)
- North Coast Church**, suburb of San Diego, CA, [www.northcoastchurch.com](http://www.northcoastchurch.com)
- North Point Community Church**, suburb of Atlanta, GA, [www.northpoint.org](http://www.northpoint.org)
- Seacoast Church**, suburb of Charleston, SC, [www.seacoast.org](http://www.seacoast.org)
- Willow Creek Community Church**, suburb of Chicago, IL, [www.willowcreek.org](http://www.willowcreek.org)





**All sizes.** Multi-site congregations occur in all sizes, with many off-site campuses averaging under 100 in weekly worship. The 12 churches in the Multi-Site Leadership Community average from 1,000 to almost 20,000 in their current weekend worship attendances.

However, multi-site isn't solely a megachurch phenomenon. Multi-site churches can be found across the size spectrum, with churches in the 250 to 500 attendance range are a frequent multi-site sponsor.

### New Multi-site Movement Is a "God Thing."

After preaching the two Saturday-evening services, Craig Groeschel and his wife Amy went home, and in the middle of the night they went to the hospital for Amy to give birth. Craig was not going to make it for next morning's services in their fast-growing congregation, **Life Church**, Edmond, Oklahoma.<sup>3</sup> Now what?



CRAIG GROESCHEL

Someone from the church had a crazy idea: "Hey, let's roll the video from Saturday night." That decision proved to be divinely inspired.

"One of the awesome things about God is how He often turns obstacles into opportunities," says Groeschel, looking back on that pivotal weekend in January, 2001. "Little did we know that one press of a button would open up



a realm of understanding—the video teaching experience—that we never thought possible."

The video "accident" enabled Life Church to gain a bigger dream of how to keep pace with the rapid growth that, at that time, had already led them to multiple services on two different campuses. Not only could they now more readily

take church across town, but across state as well. Today, the church that started in 1996 draws 7,500 people weekly across 10 services on 4 campuses—with a long-range goal of 100 weekly worship experiences worldwide.

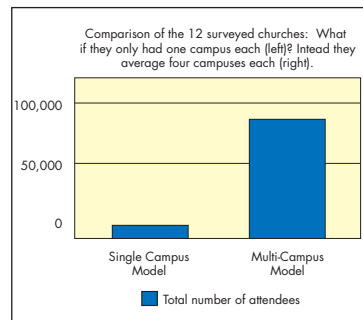
Most churches that use a multi-site approach evolve into it, rather than starting with it. That's the consensus of 12 churches who are pacesetters in doing church in multiple locations—whether video cafés, multiple campuses, or other variations. *Together they represent a weekend worship attendance of 67,600 on 46 campuses with 109 services—an average for each of 9 weekly services spread among 4 campuses!*

One of many approaches to doing multi-site church is represented by 25-year-old **Chartwell Baptist Church**, in a suburb of Toronto, Ontario, where Peter Roebbelen is pastor. (See the beginning of this document for websites of all churches mentioned.)

"We backed into multi-site," says Roebbelen. "It's not something we intentionally tried to do. It was more like a disruptive moment where we faced a problem and saw an opportunity." In essence, their problem became an opportunity.

For Chartwell, the initial motivation was to accommodate growth. "We needed to go to a third service, but we wanted to do it during the optimal Sunday-morning time." So Chartwell began experimenting with the use of additional campuses. That was 1993. Ten years

**MOST CHURCHES THAT USE A MULTI-SITE APPROACH EVOLVE INTO IT, RATHER THAN STARTING WITH IT.**



PETER ROEBBELEN

**THEIR PROBLEM BECAME AN OPPORTUNITY.**

later Chartwell offers 6 Saturday-night or Sunday-morning services on 4 campuses. By early 2003, more than 1,000 regularly attended one of the Chartwell congregations, and yet the main church's seating capacity was 260—and still is—consistent with their particular strategy of creating a sense of relational intimacy within each local worship setting.

Near Charleston, S.C., **Seacoast Church** is currently worshipping 5,500 total in 10 services



Seacoast's imaginative use of rented facilities includes this building at the entrance of a shipping center

on 5 campuses. Their primary trigger for going multi-site was lack of space; but they faced other motivators too. "Our problem was that people were showing up, and the town shut down any expansion hopes. We aren't content whenever people are going to hell if we can make a

difference," says Seacoast's Byron Davis, a lay leader. As a result, they became really imaginative about how to use existing spaces: college campuses, theaters, closed churches, and warehouses. "At first we thought the resistance

was the devil, but actually expanding to multiple campuses was the best thing we could do—God had a hand in it," he says.

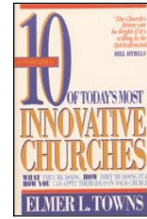
**AT LEAST 1,000 CHURCHES ACROSS NORTH AMERICA COULD CURRENTLY BE DESCRIBED AS MULTI-SITE.**

**The scope.** Leadership Network's study and connection with churches like Chartwell and Seacoast leads to the belief that at least 1,000 churches across

North America could currently be described as multi-site. They become multi-site by extending themselves to more than one location: some across town, some across the state, and some literally around the world.

Church analysts have been observing this trend for a number of years. In the 1990 book, *Ten of*

*Today's Most Innovative Churches* by Elmer Towns, 3 of the 10 featured churches have modeled, for some part of their recent history, the practice Towns calls "one church meeting in many locations. . . a multi-staffed church, meeting in multi-locations, offering multi-ministries, with a single identity, single organization, single purpose, [and] single force of leadership."<sup>4</sup>



ELMER TOWNS

**Emerging movement.** Roebbelen has the added context of being one of the few people who have researched the development in recent years. Using a study grant from the Lilly Endowment-funded Louisville Institute<sup>5</sup>, he visited a number of different locations. His analysis? "I think this is a true movement, a true new work because it's popping up in isolated situations all over the place at about the same time."

The people he interviewed don't seem to be fad driven. "It's a God thing," Roebbelen says. "Most didn't sit down to strategize and plan, and then conclude, 'We're going to try multi-site,' because none of us had heard of multi-site. We simply began doing it. The stories have been remarkably similar from coast to coast and from north to south."

**THEY ... DON'T SEEM TO BE FAD DRIVEN. "IT'S A GOD THING," ROEBBELEN SAYS.**

Most multi-site churches can identify with the television commercial for Electronic Data Systems ([www.eds.com](http://www.eds.com)), in which a work team constructs a commercial airplane while it is being flown. The ad concludes, "In a sense, this is what we do—we build your digital business, even while you're up and running." Likewise, many multi-site leaders are figuring it out while doing it, and feel the responsibility of having passengers already aboard.



"We started in 1998 because we were



LARRY OSBORNE

out of space, out of good time slots, out of energy, and out of options,” says Larry Osborne, pastor of **North Coast Church** in Vista, CA. “After we launched our video venues, it was like holding a tiger by the tail. It’s gone from temporary fix to long-term strategy for us, both on-site and off-site.” The church’s growth underscores the “tiger’s” power, as attendance has zoomed from 3,000 in 1998 to more than 5,700 today, with 13 weekend services on 2 campuses. One of Larry’s staff, Dennis Choy, adds, “Along the way, we’ve helped at least 200 other churches interested in doing church in more than one place at a time.”



DENNIS CHOY

According to Leadership Network’s surveys, the most-cited trigger reason for launching multiple campuses or multiple venues is lack-of-space issues. These ranged from a lack of seats or parking spots at optimal service times to zoning/building restrictions on future growth. The second most-often cited trigger reason is a vision to impact through “more” instead of “bigger”—i.e. a desire to avoid certain downsides of megachurches.

**Solving problems.** A remarkable consensus surfaced between the twelve Multi-site Leadership Community participants. All agree that they see multi-site churches emerging in a wide variety of places and that a multi-site approach seems to help solve many problems.

For Dave Ferguson, pastor of **Community Christian Church**, Naperville, IL, each new campus represents an answer to a different problem. Their first site was triggered by a new Christian in the congregation who asked, “How can we get this kind of community into the real estate developments I’m building?” The answer was to take the church to them. The church’s next site began when a 163-year-old severely declining church gave their land and facility to Community Christian.



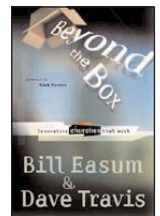
DAVE FERGUSON

Today, Community Christian Church has 4 campuses used to produce 11 weekly services totaling more than 3,000 in worship. Ferguson

has seen enough to offer a bold prediction: “We’re to the point that we can’t imagine doing church any other way.”

Ferguson wrote an article entitled “The Multi-Site Church” for *Leadership Journal*.<sup>6</sup> The editors’ opening statement predicted: “The multi-site church is a phenomenon that you will no doubt be hearing about in the future.” Ferguson then developed the article to show how a multi-site church capitalizes on what Jim Collins, author of *Built to Last*,<sup>7</sup> calls “the genius of the AND” – the paradoxical view that allows you to pursue both A and B simultaneously. Ferguson listed eight such advantages, each of which solves a problem in its own way:

- Grow larger AND grow smaller
- Brand new AND trusted brand
- Staff with generalists AND specialists
- Less cost AND greater impact
- New church vibe AND big church punch
- Move there AND stay here
- More need AND more support
- More outreach AND more maturity



**Not a growth strategy.** Bill Easum and Dave Travis have observed that the genius of multi-site is not that it grows your church, but it keeps it growing. In their book, *Beyond the Box: Innovative Churches that Work*, they comment, “The key to understanding the multi-site movement is to remember that fulfilling the Great Commission drives these congregations, not a growth strategy.”<sup>8</sup> Dave Ferguson underscores the outreach value: “Multi-site is a proactive strategy for reaching more people, not just a reactive response to over-crowding.” Larry



BILL EASUM



DAVE TRAVIS

“MULTI-SITE IS A MEANS TOWARD AN END, NOT AN END GOAL IN ITSELF.”

Osborne emphasizes that multiple services fuel growth, but rarely create it: “Video venues are a great ministry tool but a pathetic engine.”

In short, multi-site is a means toward an end, not an end goal in itself. Most churches do generate growth through multi-site, but just as importantly, multi-site keeps them from capping the growth they’re experiencing.

### Everyone Is Tailoring It to Their Own Mission.

The core idea for the multi-site movement is rather simple—one church in multiple locations. Yet the outward expression is more like a smorgasbord than a single-niche restaurant chain. This is not a McDonald’s franchise movement where all menus look alike.<sup>9</sup> While each church shows an intentional sense of brand identity, and resembles the mother ship in some



profound ways, few multi-site churches come across like an exact clone of the parent church. According to consultant Carl George, “Though variations will arise spontaneously to adapt to local conditions, the influence of strong visionary leaders is what will make the units viable. A can-do spirit that places obedience to the great commission above the petty complaints characterizing leadership in non-growing churches will be found in all of the successful ventures of this kind.”



CARL GEORGE

**Not just worship.** These churches aren’t just offering a worship service on their off-site location. **North Point**, in suburban Atlanta, for example, formally launched its second campus on Easter, 2003, some 20 miles away from the main campus (bringing North Point’s total number of weekend services to 5). The Buckhead Campus was as full-service as people would find on the main Alpharetta campus. Buckhead Church on launch day included children’s ministry, student ministry, singles ministry, college ministry, and small groups, each with a team responsible to oversee and build them. All of the Buckhead staff had been trained at the main campus, and most had been on staff there in largely the same roles as they took on at the Buckhead campus.

North Point’s approach represented 10% of the attendance at the main campus. With about 1,200 in Buckhead and 12,000 on the main campus, the scale of the “mother church” creates a sizable “child” at birth. Likewise **Willow Creek**, the second-largest attendance church in North America, wants to make each of its campuses a hub in and of itself. Other churches are following the same pattern: they approach multi-site not just as a worship service, but a full-functioning campus, even if some of the activities are done in conjunction with other campuses.

Eight yes-no defining issues. In what ways are approaches to multi-campus ministry being tailored? The following list illustrates some of the variations:

1. *Are all worship services at the same campus?* Of the 12 representative churches in the Multi-Site Leadership Community, half did an on-campus multiple-venue approach before doing an off-campus satellite or venue. Typical of that group is **Fellowship Bible Church**, Little Rock, AR, with weekend worship attendance of 5,500. Their first step toward an off-site location took place in March 2003 just a few hundred feet from their main sanctuary in a large special-events room. The venue is known as New Community, and all aspects of the worship experience are live except the preaching, which is done by video (time-delayed DVD). A second on-campus venue called The Edge began in June 2003 in another large fellowship area, bringing their total Sunday services to 5, all on one campus at present. Both of these approaches are viewed as a test environment before a possible move off-site.
2. *Are all worship services in the same language?* In a homogeneous community where everyone shares the same mother tongue, the language issue rarely even comes up for discussion. In urban, immigrant, and other multi-lingual communities, it is a significant issue—and usually an advantage of the multi-site approach. Mark Jobe, for example, pastors what started in the 1940s as a storefront church in a Hispanic section of downtown Chicago. **New Life** is one church

in multiple locations (9 services on 8 campuses with total weekly worship attendance of 2,000), but some of its locations are in Spanish-language only. “Because we represent various different cultures and ethnic groups, we do not have a unified approach to worship,” comments Jobe. “We do come together a couple of times a year for a combined bi-lingual worship experience.”



MARK JOBE

**New Life** also preaches the same message by different people in multiple locations. One of the teaching pastors prepares an outline of a passage and e-mails it to the preaching team. Each pastor studies the passage and then they get together as a team to work on their sermons. The result is the same message taught at eight different locations on Sunday by eight different individuals who preach it in the language of that setting and apply it in that local context. “The whole church remains on the same learning page and the pastors have the advantage of a team working on a passage together,” says Jobe.



DAVE BROWNING

Sometimes the language is all English, but the nuances are distinct. **Christ the King Community Church** is based in the Skagit Valley 60 miles north of Seattle, Washington. “The geography in our valley led us to decentralize since there is not one large population center, but several medium-size population centers,” explains Dave Browning, who started the church in 1999. “In the Skagit Valley the population is distributed among several towns, so we determined that if our goal was to effectively reach out to thousands of unchurched people in this valley, we would have to do that in more than one place.” By 2003, Christ the King sponsored 13 services on 7 campuses, each in a

“THE MULTIPLEX THEATER ROUGHLY CORRESPONDS TO A CHURCH HAVING MULTIPLE SERVICES. PEOPLE LIKE TO HAVE OPTIONS,” BROWNING SAYS.

different city, totaling 1,400 weekly worshippers. Three different languages are used, and the ones in English are not identical. “By decentralizing the church and using smaller venues, we are able to have different services at different times with different teachers in different locations,” summarizes Browning.

He likens the idea to the offerings at a movie theater. “Decades ago, movies were shown only once a week. Then theaters offered multiple showings. The multiplex theater roughly corresponds to a church having multiple services. People like to have options,” Browning says.

3. *Are all locations designed to have similar feel?* **Gulf Breeze United Methodist Church**, based three miles east of Pensacola, FL, went multi-site in order to overcome geographic barriers and to capitalize on diverse demographics for its area. Its 3 campuses so far (and 7 total services) have enabled it to grow to nearly 2,000 weekly worshippers, despite the fact that the city of Gulf Breeze has a population of less than 6,000 and is restricted by water on three sides and a national park on the fourth side! The widely diverse demographics of its 3 locations have resulted in 3 different feels for how to shape the worship liturgy and weekly programming, each designed to reach people for Christ in a way they can best relate to. “One of our campuses excels in innovation, and another in excellence,” says Mack Strange, pastor of Gulf Breeze. “Different values like these reach different people.”



Geographic challenges faced by Gulf Breeze



MACK STRANGE

One of **Chartwell Baptist Church's** congregations operates in the heart of the poorest area of Oakville, ON, meeting on the ground floor of a four-story, 52-unit,

subsidized apartment building that Chartwell owns and operates. “It has the feel of a ‘mission church’ and is beginning to develop quite differently than our other congregations,” says Roebbelen.

4. *Do all worship services that week have the same teacher?* For **Willow Creek Community Church**, in a western suburb of Chicago, one of the goals for their regional campuses is to provide a Willow Creek experience within a 30-minute drive of anyone in Chicagoland. Their approach uses a videocast format to provide the same teaching at each location. Willow Creek was founded in 1975, and their regional campus approach was launched in 2001. Currently they draw 18,500 total weekend attenders in 8 adult and 6 children services on 3 campuses. Three adult services are videocast from the main campus to the regional sites. The goal is to make each campus a fully-functioning congregation. After experimenting with multiple video elements

—such as worship teams and drama—the regional campuses are moving toward the use of a videocast sermon with as many live elements as possible. “The more live on-site, the more local ownership and energy in the service,” says Jim Tomberlin, Willow Creek regional pastor.

5. *Are all worship services in the same geographic area?* Worship attendance at **Seacoast Church**, based in Charleston, S.C., currently represents a total of 5,500 people in 10 services on 5 campuses, with dreams of expanding to numerous cities across South Carolina and in neighboring states. Like many other congregations, Seacoast found the multi-site idea to be a helpful means to an end. “We came to the multi-site model from

two perspectives,” explains Greg Surratt, senior pastor. “First, we have not been able to build fast enough to keep up with our growth. Then our local town council vetoed plans to expand our facilities in 2002, which exacerbated the problem and sped up our plans to expand through multi-campus. We are also committed to providing a large church experience in a small church environment and the multi-campus model is the next logical step in that journey.”

6. *Does the church use during-the-week small groups as an integral part of its approach?* The answer is yes in almost every case—and with good results. Of the 12 Multi-site Leadership Community churches surveyed, half indicate that more than 50% of adults attending all campuses are involved in small groups.

Some churches even link their pulpit teaching to their small-group content. **North Coast’s** mission statement is “Making disciples in a healthy church environment,” and for them sermon-based small groups form an essential link—one of four measurements as the vital signs of church health (the four measurements involve Word, Worship, Warmth, and Witness). “We want to make church a place of significant relationships, so we consistently shoot for 80% of our people in small groups,” says senior pastor Larry Osborne. North Coast’s Growth Group ministry is a small-group structure that takes a lecture/lab approach to the sermons. North Coast has reached that 80% benchmark each year since 1985, and maintained the same ratio since launching their video venue strategy in 1998. That small-group feeling of intimacy then carries into North Coast’s video venues, which have the atmosphere of a fellowship-size church more than a megachurch auditorium. As Osborne often reminds pastors, “Most leaders like it big, but most people like it small.”

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JIM TOMBERLIN

“THE MORE LIVE  
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TOMBERLIN, WILLOW  
CREEK REGIONAL  
PASTOR.



GREG SURRETT

7. Are all campuses intended to stay connected to the main campus?



GARY BRANDENBURG

**Grace Community Church** in Tyler, TX, is one church in three locations. Currently they have one unified budget and one administrative center. Each site has its own teaching pastor, and Gary Brandenburg is senior pastor over the entire church, which currently worships 2,300 total in 6 services

on 3 campuses. The long-range vision is for something like Grace Associates—a network of extension campuses that eventually become distinct local churches. “Our extension campuses may eventually become autonomous as we continue to bring more campuses online,” says Brandenburg.

8. Do your off-site facilities receive the same caliber of funding as your main location? Some multi-site churches build off-site facilities that will last, that perhaps one day will even spin off into separate congregations. Others have no plan for their off-sites to be around by the time their grandchildren grow up. Thus some rent theaters and schools while others do capital campaigns or creative real-estate partnerships that are designed to meet the needs of the next stage of ministry.

**Video variables.** One additional major point of demarcation involves the use of video. Some churches do all their extension-site sermons via video. That includes **Willow Creek, North Point,** and **North Coast**, where the preaching is delivered by video screen, and is supported by the presence of local campus teams for worship music, drama, and “face with the place” pastoral presence. Sometimes the video is live, but most is prerecorded, such as a Saturday-evening or Wednesday-evening message being taped and played the next day.

Some churches tailor the use of video to each site. For **Christ the King**, for example, only 2 of the 7 campuses use video substantially. **Life Church** in Oklahoma uses a combination—at the local sites, senior pastor Craig Groeschel drives back and forth across town for live preaching, while at sites outside Edmond the satellite congregations use

videocast preaching. A few churches, such as **Gulf Breeze**, offer no preaching via video screen on any of their campuses.

**Times.** When is the optimal time slot for offering the additional church services? Noon on Sunday is one of the largest-attended services for Life Church in Oklahoma. More often, it is the 10:30 or 11:00 slot. Sometimes the most-attended service is at the same time for all campuses, but sometimes it is not.

**On the horizon.** Some churches are using the multi-site concept to explore digital niche ministries, from fire-houses to nursing homes. “Big churches often don’t think of the small venues, but we can easily do them,” says **Chartwell Baptist’s** Peter Roebbelen. “Multi-site through video venue provides an opportunity to specifically target different subgroups,” adds **North Coast’s** Larry Osborne. “If you multiply 20 people enough times, you can impact a lot of people.”

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#### Summary of Multi-Site Approaches

**A. Multi-Venue:** One church, with many on-site venues (all on same campus)  
Example: Fellowship Bible (Little Rock)

**B. Regional Multi-Site:** One church, with many campuses (all in the same region)  
Example: Chartwell (Toronto), Gulf Breeze (Pensacola), New Life (Chicago), North Point (Atlanta), Willow Creek (Chicago)

**C. Extended Multi-Site:** One church, with branches all over (unlimited geographic reach)  
Example: Christ the King (Seattle), Community Christian (Chicago), Grace Community (Tyler), Life Church (Edmond), Seacoast (Charleston)

**D. Church Planting Multi-Site:** One church, composed of multiple congregations (purposeful church planting)  
Example: None from the 12 examples studied for this report.

**E. Variations on the Above Themes:** One church embodying a combination of all the approaches.  
Example: North Coast is doing video venue on both the main site (A) and a second campus (B), while considering extended multi-site (C)

**Measuring the Risks.** All churches doing multi-site seem to have a comfort zone that surrounds the basic conviction, “There are lots of ways to do it.” The bigger divergence is in the level of risk that people are willing to take. Some are saying, in concert with the above-mentioned EDS ad, “We’ve got to get this airplane fixed before we land.” Others didn’t want to launch without a well-mapped plan, from finances to staffing. This latter group does affirm, however, that multi-site is an ever-moving target: “It’s a process thing—we’re moving toward it, and we need to keep at it.”

Becoming multi-site changes—and presumably enhances—who you are as a church (“We have a commitment to X; how does multi-site enhance X?”). It adds value to you and to the people you’re reaching. Sometimes it helps free up certain resources and recovers certain values lost along the way, such as a corporate sense of intimate community. But it also increases certain risk levels.

**Evaluating opportunities.** In assessing how much risk to take when spinning off multiple campuses, the kinds of self-diagnostic questions that churches tend to ask themselves include:

- *How far are we willing to extend ourselves—to other rooms on our campus? across town? across our state or province? around the world?*
- *How different will the satellites be from the main campus?*
- *How much unity of vision is required – is this a branch? a franchise? or a licensee?*
- *How will the satellite sites connect back to the main campus?*
- *How centralized do we stay?*
- *How much permission will we grant for an off-site to fail?*
- *How much control will the main campus maintain (will we be more like multi-campus or will we become a mini-denomination)?*
- *How much change will we allow from how things are done at the main campus?*
- *How much momentum should we*

*expect to see to determine if a new site is viable?*

- *How soon do we expect the extension campuses to move from being a resource drain to being a fully contributing resource?*
- *How many people (leaders and artists) need to be in place before we launch a new site?*
- *How will we prevent a loss of quality in the new site, and what is the defining point for deciding the quality level is not acceptable?*
- *How much money does it take to birth the new site, both for the launch stage, and then until it reaches a point of self-support?*

**Look of Leadership.** Although risk management is a major concern, by far the biggest need voiced by multi-site churches is for leadership development. Everyone’s biggest concern has the word leadership in it. This topic seems to be in the top five for churches of every size, style, and stripe, but it is especially crucial for churches doing multi-site. Bobby Gruenewald, pastor of systems development at **Life Church**, is fairly typical in this observation: “The leadership aspect has been by far the most challenging for us, and we initially thought that other dimensions would be more difficult.”

As Bill Easum and Dave Travis explain in their book, “In every case we’ve seen, staffing the multi-site church is a significant challenge.... Multi-sites also require a higher competency level among all staff than is found in most single-site congregations.... The core staff must be more like ‘athletic directors.’ They aren’t just coaches or great athletes. They know how to oversee coaches who run teams.”<sup>10</sup>

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“DONATING ONE KIDNEY IS FINE, BUT IT GETS TRICKY AFTER YOU’VE GIVEN UP YOUR SECOND KIDNEY!”



DAVID MCDANIEL

Leadership development is an area where multi-site churches in Leadership Network’s Multi-site Leadership Community are purposing to be very intentional for the future. When asked about the quality of leadership track offered developing potential and existing staff and ministry leaders, the typical self-rating is mediocre at best.

In larger churches, most of the staff tends to be home grown, and Leadership Network’s multi-site participants are no exception. Thus, it comes as no surprise that the staff for the satellite campuses usually comes from the main church. To a degree, that’s healthy, because it opens slots for emerging talent to fill. However, as the number of sites expands, the challenge grows greater. As David McDaniel, campus director for **North Point’s** Buckhead extension site says, “Donating one kidney is fine, but it gets tricky after you’ve given up your second kidney!”

**Relational leadership.** The exact staffing structure varies from church to church in terms of what is centralized and what is decentralized. A common denominator tends to be a relational factor rather than control issues. As **Chartwell’s** Peter Roebbelen says, “I’m convinced that the stuff that really holds us together is relationship. It’s not policy or control or even the senior pastor.” The same is true for the identifying and raising up of future leaders, who continually make time to be a catalyst and talent scout. “I spend a lot of time looking for new people with leadership potential,” says Troy McMahon, business pastor at **Community Christian**.

**New roles.** One aspect of the leadership challenge is the new roles created by a multi-campus approach. Almost all multi-site congregations designate someone with the weekly role of being the “face with the place”—someone more than an emcee, someone with leadership gifts and little desire for a teaching platform. Most call that person the

campus pastor. Other parallel titles include campus director, teaching pastor and venue pastor. As the number of off-sites increases, another new role often emerges—the person whose responsibility it is to wake up each day thinking about all of the church’s off-site ministries. That individual is sometimes called the multi-site director.

From **Willow Creek**, as the largest-attendance participant in this Multi-Site Leadership Community, to the youngest and smallest-attendance multi-site church, the discovery path has been similar in defining the campus pastor role. Kevin Penry of **Life Church** voices what was typical for many: “Fourteen months ago our vision was to find an emcee. Now we realize we need a leader; the campus pastor must bring leadership to the table.”



KEVIN PENRY

Likewise the partnership is important between senior pastor (or multi-site director) and the “face with the place” at each local site. “We work hard to develop synergy between the video screen and local hosts,” says Penry. “The campus pastor can add equity to the video pastor. Works the other way too.”

**Financial leadership.** For all 12 churches, going multi-site required up-front moneys, usually a sizable chunk of change, but most also expected their off-site locations to become self-supporting. **New Life** in Chicago, which has been doing multi-site since 1998, is typical. It owns three church buildings, is purchasing two others, and rents its other meeting sites. Each location is responsible for its own operating expenses. Each location contributes 5% towards administration and 5% towards missions projects and 2% towards starting other locations.

**Seacoast’s** financial approach is only slightly more complicated. Each site is started with upfront moneys that are considered a loan from the Seacoast Network. The campus pastor builds, with network approval, and operates an individual budget with 10% of income going toward paying back the startup loan and 10% going toward network expenses. All accounting is done at the main campus. “We expect campuses

to be self-sustaining within one year,” says Greg Surratt. “Benchmarks are 250 attenders giving \$800 per year for a budget of \$200,000.”

Likewise, **Willow Creek** wants each regional center to become a self-supporting extension as soon as possible. For them, “soon” came very quickly: The first regional site, Willow Wheaton, met budget in its first year. “We expected it would take two years to be self-sufficient,” Jim Tomberlin says, “but it happened in six months.” The second regional campus in Chicago’s North Shore community launched in 2003 should be self-supporting by year’s end. For Willow, the money stays at the site in this way: The initial set-up cost for launching a site comes from “Chapter 2” funds. They are given as a gift to the site with no expectation to “pay back” Willow Creek. All giving to the general budget of a regional center directly supports the ministry of that center. Any income that exceeds the break-even costs will reside with the regional site for local needs and expansion. Willow Creek is willing to assist from “Chapter 2” funds if there is a shortfall.

**Christ the King** even builds in a way of funding future sites. “We try to spend our dollars in the following ratios,” explains Dave Browning. “For personnel, 50%; for the physical plant, 20%; for programming, 20%; and for new sites, 10%.” They call that last category, PIF, for “pay it forward.”

In short, multi-site has the potential of expanding ministry in economical ways—doing more with less overall staff, and renting some facilities rather than buying or building everything.

**What Resources Are Accelerating the Work?** The world of multi-site ministry requires wrestling with several tough questions, most fundamentally: “Is this who God has called us to be?” Spin-off questions range from “What is the opportunity represented here?” to “Is this a fix to an immediate problem or a long-term strategy?” to “Is multi-site something we can do best?” Suppose you’ve caught the vision for multi-site ministry—now what? What follows are the initial steps people took as they explored the idea of whether God was calling them to extend their ministry through additional campuses.

1. *Ask around locally.* Many churches in the prayer and investigation stage of becoming a multi-site congregation do on-site visits with local multi-site churches. The idea is to experience it firsthand and to observe what pieces seem to work best – an experiential “best practices” approach.

2. *Travel to a model.* Many leadership teams get on an airplane to attend a conference hosted by a multi-site church, or simply to visit a high-visibility church doing multi-site.

3. *Visit vicariously online.* Many church leadership teams also do “virtual” visits to multi-campus churches by browsing their web sites. Internet sites for the 12 congregations selected to participate in a Multi-Site Leadership Community with Leadership Network appear at the beginning of this document. Of those, the ones with the most extensive FAQ section with their spin on multi-site are:

- **North Coast;** the FAQ section can be reached directly at [www.videocafes.org](http://www.videocafes.org).
- **Community Christian’s “New Thing Network”** can be reached directly at [www.newthing.org](http://www.newthing.org) or phoning 630-388-5205.
- **Willow Creek** has FAQ sections on each of its regional campuses. Go to [www.WillowCreek.org](http://www.WillowCreek.org) and click the sections (currently at lower left) for the various regional campuses.

Other churches also have extensive websites explaining their multi-site journey—often modeling how they presented it to the congregation. One great example is **Bethlehem Baptist Church**, Minneapolis, MN, [www.bbcmpls.org/goingwogoing.htm](http://www.bbcmpls.org/goingwogoing.htm).

4. *Track earlier and ongoing developments.* Go to the “Resource” section of Leadership

Network's website, [www.leadnet.org](http://www.leadnet.org) for additional information, such as an earlier commentary, "Multi-Site Special Report" (September 2001).

5. Go to [www.leadnet.org](http://www.leadnet.org) and subscribe to Explorer and Into Action (free e-publications) for periodic updates on multi-site and other innovative approaches to doing church in the twenty-first century.

#### Advantages of Multi-Site, Multi-Venue Ministry

1. Brings together the best aspects of larger church and smaller church.
2. Increases the total number of seats available during optimal seeker times.
3. Overcomes geographic barriers when a church facility is landlocked or tightly zoned.
4. Enables untapped talent to emerge each time a new venue is opened.
5. Mobilizes volunteers through an added variety of ministry opportunities.
6. Increases options of location and sometimes of worship style too.
7. Assists in reaching friends and family who wouldn't travel a great distance to church.
8. Accelerates the climate for diversity, creativity, and innovation in ministry.
9. Improves a church's stewardship of funds and resources.
10. Enables a church to extend itself into niches like a cancer ward or office complex.
11. Helps a congregation see evidences of how it's part of a larger Kingdom mission.
12. Models and trains people for church planting elsewhere.
13. Provides a "pipeline" for the development of emerging leaders and future staff.

### New Set of Physical Boundaries for Your Church.

In short, *the multi-site movement is about a new way of re-assigning the physical boundaries of a church.* Asked how their journey has changed them, participants in the April 2003 Multi-Site Leadership Community showed new confidence in the unconventional directions they've already taken. "I'm leaving behind the thought that what we're doing is crazy," said one. "Confusion over whether this is going to work," said another. "Small dreams," said another. "The feeling of being alone on this new frontier," voiced yet another.

What did they gain from two days of networking and planning? "Encouragement for the future, perspective, and the power therein," said one participant. "Excitement and anticipation," said another. "A renewed vision of what God is doing throughout our church in our city and beyond," said someone else. "An openness to ride the wave as God moves—and to enjoy the ride!" said another.

**Always outreach.** For everyone, the multi-site ride has been about opportunities: reaching more people, developing more leaders, and influencing other churches. "It's about Jesus' Great Commission," said one leader. "It's not about us, it's about God." Another's summary put everything in context, reminding us who has the biggest vision of all—"I'm taking with me the reinforced idea that God is *big*."

THE MULTI-SITE  
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WARREN BIRD



GREG LIGON

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Want to find more resources like this one? For the most current listing of free and purchasable resources, some of which are distributed solely through Leadership Network, go to:

[www.leadnet.org/multisitechurchesResources.asp](http://www.leadnet.org/multisitechurchesResources.asp). (alternate: [www.leadnet.org](http://www.leadnet.org), then select "Learning Resources" then "Special Reports") or call toll-free 800-765-5323 or 214-969-5950 outside the U.S. and Canada.

Leadership Network's mission is to identify, connect and help high-capacity Christian leaders multiply their impact.

## ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup> Ferguson, Dave. "The Multi-Site Church: Some of the Strengths of This New Life Form," Leadership Journal, Spring 2003, 81. See [www.christianitytoday.com/leaders/](http://www.christianitytoday.com/leaders/)

<sup>2</sup> Schaller, Lyle E. *Discontinuity and Hope: Radical Change and the Path to the Future*. Nashville: Abingdon, 1999, 174-179, emphasis added. See also Schaller, Lyle E. *The Very Large Church: New Rules for Leaders*. Nashville: Abingdon, 2000, 110-112, 135-136, 192-194; Schaller, Lyle E. *Innovations in Ministry*, chapter 6 "Off-Campus Ministries" and chapter 8 "The Multi-Site Option, Nashville: Abingdon, 1994, 86-97, 112-133; Schaller, Lyle E. *Forty-Four Questions for Church Planters*, chapter 4 "The Multi-Site Option", Nashville: Abingdon, 1991, 56-58.

<sup>3</sup> See beginning of this document for web sites of all churches mentioned.

<sup>4</sup> Towns, Elmer. *Ten of Today's Most Innovative Churches*, Regal, 1990, 239. Although the book is out of print, it is available at [www.elmertowns.com](http://www.elmertowns.com), currently at no charge.

<sup>5</sup> [www.louisville-institute.org](http://www.louisville-institute.org)

<sup>6</sup> Ferguson, Dave. "The Multi-Site Church: Some of the Strengths of This New Life Form," Leadership Journal, Spring 2003, 81-84, [www.christianitytoday.com/le/2003/002/21.81.html](http://www.christianitytoday.com/le/2003/002/21.81.html). See also Eric Reed "Let's Go to the Tape," Leadership Journal, Spring 2003, 76-80, [www.christianitytoday.com/le/2003/002/20.76.html](http://www.christianitytoday.com/le/2003/002/20.76.html)

<sup>7</sup> Collins, Jim. *Built to Last: Successful Habits of Visionary Companies*. HarperBusiness, 2002.

<sup>8</sup> Easum, Bill, and Travis, Dave, *Beyond the Box: Innovative Churches that Work*. Loveland, CO: Group Publishing, 2003, 85.

<sup>9</sup> The McChurch graphic is courtesy of the graphic collection available from Ginghamburg Church, [www.ginghamburg.org](http://www.ginghamburg.org)

<sup>10</sup> Easum, Bill, and Travis, Dave, *Beyond the Box: Innovative Churches that Work*. Loveland, CO: Group Publishing, 2003, 100-101.