

LAUNCH FACTORS

When to Start *Your* Next Venue or Site

by Warren Bird

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AT-A-GLANCE

Overview

Section 1 - Ways Multi-Sites Get Started

- 1 Part of church vision for “this is how we do ministry”
- 2 Decision made or “stumbled into” due to:
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 - b. Desire to reach new area or target demographic
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Overview

In the business world, Southwest Airlines was born because industry veterans recognized an opportunity for alternate flight routes. Southwest's new "hub-less" approach made it more appealing for some people to fly. Elsewhere, leaders at Harley-Davidson motorcycles discovered that if they changed the image of their motorcycles, they could attract a whole new clientele toward becoming Harley riders. Yet another sector of the transportation industry, Mercedes-Benz automobiles, became accessible to more types of people by broadening its product line. It still sells distinctive, quality cars, but it now offers everything from an entry-level coupe series to child-friendly SUVs.

Churches today are making similar kinds of adjustments with the places they "do church," many experiencing new areas of fruitfulness as a result. Their discoveries involve all the dynamics mentioned above—alternate options, increased

convenience, modified image, expanded targets, greater accessibility, additional choices—and more. A buzz surrounds this church experimentation even though no single buzzword has emerged yet to define it. The term **multi-site** may not have monopoly status, but multi-site is often used to describe this new approach to doing church.

More Than Multiple Services. Most North Americans are familiar with the idea of doing

multiple services in the main sanctuary (or equivalent), such as Sunday morning at 9:30 and 11:00, and perhaps Saturday evening as well. But what happens when a church *expands farther* to include:

- *An on-premises additional venue, such as a*

live service with video sermon in church gym?

- *An off-premises **satellite** or **branch** or **regional-campus** location, such as a school or converted warehouse across town?*
- *A **sponsored** church, whether in the same community or halfway around the world, where the staff, style, or content comes from the parent campus, and where the church in turn identifies itself as a site of the parent campus?*

The term *multi-site* covers all of these concepts, up to the point of starting a totally new church. A church's multi-site location might sponsor all the same ministries as the parent campus, or it might offer only worship services at its various sites. The common thread is that the church "happens" at more than one location.

In short, *multi-site* summarizes today's approach to church where geography is no longer the defining factor. Gone is the day where gatherings must happen Sunday morning and in the church sanctuary (or equivalent) for it to be called "church." Both Christians and the general public have accepted this reality.

Of the several hundred North American churches following some form of multi-site approach today, a group of 12 pacesetters are allowing themselves to be carefully studied over a two-year process, and have offered themselves as examples for other churches to learn from. They came together as a leadership community at the invitation of Leadership Network (www.leadnet.org), a Dallas-based private foundation whose mission is to accelerate the effectiveness of the Church by identifying, connecting, and resourcing strategic

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MULTI-SITE SUMMARIZES TODAY'S APPROACH TO CHURCH WHERE GEOGRAPHY IS NO LONGER THE DEFINING FACTOR.

leaders. The member churches of “Multi-Site Churches Leadership Community Group Two” are:

- Bethlehem** Baptist Church, (Baptist General Conference), Minneapolis, MN, www.bbcmpls.org
 - Community** Presbyterian Church, (PCUSA), Danville, CA, www.cpcdanville.org
 - Evergreen** Community Church (Non-denominational), Burnsville, MN, www.evergreenc.com
 - First Baptist** Church (SBC), Windermere, FL, www.fbcwindermere.com
 - Jacksonville** Chapel (Non-denominational), Lincoln Park, NJ, www.jacksonvillechapel.org
 - Mecklenburg** Community Church (Non-denominational), Charlotte, NC, www.mecklenburg.org
 - Northland**, A Church Distributed (Non-denominational), Longwood, FL, www.northlandcc.net
 - Olathe** Bible Church, (Bible), Olathe, KS, www.olathebible.org
 - Southside** Community Church (Baptist Union of W. Canada), Surrey, BC, Canada, www.southside.ca
 - Stillwater** United Methodist Church, (UMC), Dayton, OH, www.stillwaterumc.org
 - The Chapel**, (Non-denominational), Akron, OH, www.the-chapel.org
 - The Garden**, St. Luke’s United Methodist Church (UMC), Indianapolis, IN, www.the-garden.org
- (The boldface words are the short-hand names that will be used in this document.)*

THIS CONCEPT PAPER
WILL HELP YOU
ASSESS WHETHER THE
MULTI-SITE APPROACH
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AND IF SO, WHAT
LAUNCH RHYTHM
MIGHT WORK BEST
FOR YOUR CONTEXT.

How Churches Become Multi-Site. This concept paper offers an overview of how these 12 churches decided to engage in a multi-site strategy, especially the decision-making process behind how they launched a new venue or site for the first time, second time, third time and more. It will cover everything from the trigger event to the values to the risk factors to the recovery period needed. *It will help you assess whether the multi-site approach is*

right for you, and if so, what launch rhythm might work best for your context.

The varieties of multi-site adaptation for churches today are unlimited. According to Charles Arn, author of *How to Start a New Service* and president of Church Growth, Inc. (www.churchgrowth.net), “I can’t help but imagine where the multi-site idea may take us in 20 years. The possibility of churches communicating their message in multiple locations has the potential of extending the Gospel in dramatic new fashion. The process is simply an application of Paul’s own life and model, ‘I have become all things to all people so that by all possible ways I might save some’” (1 Cor 9:22, NIRV) [ENDNOTE: Baker, 1997]



CHARLES ARN

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Section 1, Ways Multi-Sites Get Started

What prompts a church to take a multi-site approach? Some start with multi-site intentions from day one of their existence, but most multi-sites are existing churches that decide midstream to go that way. At least four different motivations can lead an existing church to become multi-site, as outlined in the chart below. This section of “Launch Factors” examines the various trigger events.

What Prompts a Church to Become Multi-Site (Multiple Venues or Locations)?

- 1 From the Beginning -- Part of church vision for “this is how we do ministry”
- or
- 2 Along-the-Way Addition -- Decision made or “stumbled into” due to:
 - A Overcrowding
 - B Desire to reach new area or target demographic
 - C Opportunity that matched mission
 - D Mission clarification

1 From the Beginning. A few churches are planted with a “one church–many locations” approach in mind. “We didn’t go multi-site because we were forced to,” says Brent Knox, one of the founding pastors of **Evergreen Community Church** in Minneapolis-St. Paul

“WE TOOK THIS PATH BECAUSE IT WAS OUR STRATEGY FROM THE BEGINNING.”

– Brent Knox

(see the beginning of this document for church Internet addresses). “We took this path because it was our strategy from the beginning—going to wherever an evangelical presence is needed. The idea was as deeply rooted in our core values as were church planting, plurality of leadership, creating

leadership teams, and having all the leaders of all the locations work together.”

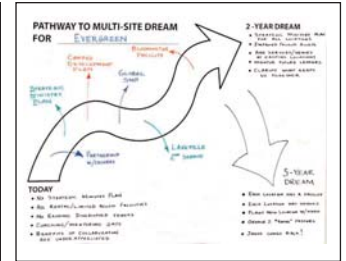
Evergreen was founded in 1988. Six years later (1994) it launched a second site. Three years later (1997) it birthed a third. Two years after that (1999) came the fourth. Two years later (2001) **Evergreen** started a church in Berlin, Germany. Two years after that (2003) came the fifth Twin Cities-area location. These 5 sites house 7 services/venues weekly, and their total weekly U.S. worship averaged 2,600 as 2003 ended. All locations also come together for couples and singles conferences, Christmas Eve services, periodic all-location “super services,” and some leadership training.

All **Evergreen** locations currently use rented school buildings. They meet in the auditorium for the service, and the lunchroom and classrooms for nursery and Sunday school. They have a different teaching team at each site, but they often try to run down a parallel track for worship and programming, such as featuring the same video or skit operated at all locations on a given weekend. Much good has come from having so many different locations, especially keeping a priority on outreach. “We feel called to be strong in outreach,” Brent Knox says. “There are many churches in America great at teaching, but not many good at outreaching. We want to

continue church-planting and to continue creating venues that reach out to specific people-groups.”



Mark Bowen, Mike Langlois, and Brent Knox (l. to r.) from Evergreen Community Church, as part of a Leadership Network Multi-Site Churches Leadership Community, are developing new pathways toward its multi-site vision.



2 Along-the-Way Addition. The majority of multi-site churches did not start with a founding-day intention to become multi-site. Some say they stumbled or backed into the idea along the way. (See several examples in “Extending Your Church to More Than One Place,” a concept paper from Leadership Network available at www.leadnet.org/multisitechurchresources/.asp.) Most were trying to solve a problem, and made creative decisions that resulted in their becoming a multi-site church.

A Overcrowding. One of the easiest trigger points to identify is overcrowding. A typical example is **First Baptist Church** in Windermere, Florida, just outside Orlando. Their seating capacity is 500, and they felt their campus limits were constraining their growth. “We’ve been out of space in a rapidly growing area and unable to meet the demands of our area,” says Senior Pastor Mark Matheson.

In 2000, they were contacted by another church based about two miles away with

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just the opposite problem. Sunday worship there was less than 20 people per week from the local community. After discussion, both churches voted almost unanimously for the struggling church to become a satellite church of **First Baptist**. “The addition of this church gave us the vision for a multi-campus approach,” Mark says. “We formed a multi-campus church organization—one church on two campuses—and gave our new congregation a full-time campus pastor.” Using the “one big idea” approach, the two campuses follow the same teaching themes about 75% of the time. (For more information on the “one big idea” approach, popularized by **Community Christian Church**, Naperville, IL, see www.communitychristian.org or “Multi-Site Special Report,” a concept paper from Leadership Network available at www.leadnet.org/multisitechurchesResources.asp).

Today the original 7-acre campus is still maxed out at 900-1,000 and the additional 4-acre campus had grown to 250 in worship by the end of 2003. “Even more important, it’s a healthy church now,” Mark affirms.

The search to solve overcrowding continues at **First Baptist**. It is trying creative angles to get maximum usage from its present facilities, such as a worship service on Wednesday night that begins at 10:00 and ends about midnight. “Due to the tourist industry, Orlando never shuts down,” Mark explains. “Sunday might as well be Wednesday around here.” The Wednesday-night

service, launched in January 2003, was averaging 50 in attendance by the end of 2003.

First Baptist is also planning for a third campus, one they will build themselves, to be launched in 2004 on a 51-acre site. This far more sizable property enables a 3,000-seat sanctuary, a bold initiative for a church running 1,400 total in 5 services/venues at 2 sites at the end of 2003, but in multi-site fashion the idea is to add this third campus to the existing ones, rather than use it to replace them.

Overcrowding is also the case at **The Chapel** on the campus of the University of Akron in Ohio. It has been a growing, outreach-centered church for 70 years, but its downtown location and 1,800-seat sanctuary simply had no room for expansion. It got to the point of doing five worship services weekly, but attendance in recent years became stuck in the mid-5,000s.

“We didn’t want to go to 6 services, so we began to explore alternative options,” says Knute Larson, longtime senior pastor. “We studied 11 options, and we finally decided to stay downtown and add another facility 9 miles south in the town of Green.”

The Chapel has planted 5 churches over the years including ones in Vietnamese, Chinese, and Spanish. This next development would be different. “Now we wanted to move a third of our people,” Knute says, “and to make both campuses full-service. We would become one church in two locations.”

The new, 80-acre campus, also with an 1,800-seat sanctuary, opened in June 2003 with two regular Sunday services. Some 2,500 people made the shift from the downtown campus. As often happens in an outreach-minded, high-momentum church, the new multi-site approach made room for more people. The



First Baptist Church, Windermere, FL, became multi-site by merger of a once-declining church (left) and by construction of a new, additional facility (right).

THE NEW MULTI-SITE APPROACH MADE ROOM FOR MORE PEOPLE.

combined result has been to cross the 6,000 mark. “We have been able to provide more seats and more opportunity for people to come to the church, and we have been able to include more in ministry,” Knute explains.

Since Knute Larson has been the single preaching voice for 20 years, he rotates campuses and is developing a preaching team from various staff members. “We have a preaching rotation. Each location has a live preacher,” he says. So the message preached one week is then given the next week at the other campus. Likewise there is only one overall staff for the two churches.



Since its 1934 beginning (pictured above, left), The Chapel has been reaching Akron one soul at a time, but now from two locations—in the university district downtown and in a suburb called Green.

The response to date is affirming, and finally there is room for the church to grow. “Our hope is that this would go so well that we would need to start another site in 6-8 years and add a video venue even sooner,” says Knute.

Community Presbyterian Church, Danville, CA, became multi-site for similar reasons. Overcrowding led to several experiments that ultimately spilled the church into a multi-location approach. In 2002, so many people had been coming to the church that it couldn't fit everyone, even with three Sunday-morning services to choose from, and even using overflow rooms with television monitors. “We started a 9:30 video café that went, ‘pow!’ So later we did it again at 11:00 with another ‘pow!’” explains Senior Pastor Scott Farmer, describing how quickly the room reached capacity. The church's website explains the distinctives of the new approach: “At the Video Café, we start every Sunday morning with a beverage and a bagel, and we provide everything you've come to expect from **Community Presbyterian**

Church—a live worship band, a host pastor, the same great kids' programs, and the same great message via video.”

But the video venues proved to be only an intermediate step, accommodating more people but not solving the problem of overcrowding. The confirmation came when the 9:30 attendance became nicknamed the “crush service” and leaders heard themselves saying, “Please stay away from 9:30 service.” They had tried a Saturday night service, but growth was slow. They had launched an 11:00 video venue, which filled, but not to the standing-room-only dilemma experienced at 9:30. The conclusion? “People like 9:30 a.m. as a time to worship, even though we have no parking or seats,” says Scott.

What should they try next? “We began wondering where else we should do it—maybe go off campus, offering an additional 9:30 service?” Scott says. “Our people have been watching TV monitors in an overflow room for 15 years, and they saw the video venue as a great improvement. The dam broke for us in that they saw mediated teaching and said, ‘That's just fine with me.’” In essence, the popularity of the on-site video venues helped the church decide to start the same thing off-site.

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The current plan is to start an off-campus video venue in 2004, and if that works well, to launch yet another off-campus video venue after that. Even though plans are in motion for a new, larger sanctuary on the main campus to be completed in 2007, the video venues have proved to be a winning formula, likely to stay as an ongoing way of reaching the church's vision: “to double the percentage of

people who confess Christ as Savior and Lord, connect to a Christian church, and contribute to the cause of Christ in their lives.”

B New Group. Desire to *reach a new area or target demographic* is another trigger point that prompts a church to become multi-site. A good example is **The Garden**, a “non-traditional service” church that has met weekly since 1995 in Beef and Boards dinner theater in Indianapolis. **The Garden** calls itself a “blossom” (or satellite) outreach of 50-year-old St. Luke’s United Methodist Church.

The Garden started when several lay leaders at St. Luke’s were trying to reach people who do not have church background, and who are unfamiliar with the liturgy, customs and language of established religion. Today many of those same leaders are still involved: one owns the dinner theater where they meet, another is the creative director, and another went to seminary and is now the pastor. Today **The Garden** continues to reach those who are uncomfortable in a traditional church setting. A contemporary rock band provides music (mostly secular adult contemporary and contemporary Christian hits), supported by PowerPoint projected lyrics. There are no handbells, organ, or choir. There is no praise music or hymns, no passing of an offering plate, and no clerical garb for the pastor, Linda McCoy. Her spoken message is brief, about 12 minutes, and video clips are interspersed as part of the message, either original productions or clips from current movies. “And the tiered seating layout—tables of 2, 4 and 8—is a perfect venue to create little communities,” adds Creative Director Suzanne Stark.

Attendance is 450-550, the result of nearly filling the place three times each Sunday morning (8:15, 9:15, 10:15). Then the facility must be cleared out in time for the dinner theatre’s Sunday matinee! The

idea of a non-traditional venue has been so effective in reaching new people that **The Garden** has launched an additional site which is profiled in the next section of this paper.



The Garden, a satellite of St. Luke’s United Methodist, holds three services each Sunday morning in a multi-tiered dinner theater. The non-traditional service is designed to reach those who are uncomfortable in a traditional-church setting.

Mecklenburg Community Church, Charlotte, NC, is also exploring creative ways of going to where the people are. The church was born in 1992 out of Senior Pastor Jim White’s vision for a church that would reach out to people interested in spiritual issues, but who think the church isn’t relevant to daily living. **Mecklenburg** experienced explosive growth, with total attendance approaching 3,000 by 2003, a high percent coming from an unchurched background.

Even so, the church launched a video venue in a movie theater in the fall of 2003. While the timing was prompted by the main campus nearing optimum seating capacity, “our motive for a satellite campus is one of mission,” says Jeff Sheets, the staff pastor who heads **Mecklenburg’s** satellite management team. “We feel that to stay true to our mission of reaching the unchurched, we have to be proactive and go to them.” As confirmation, 70 percent

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of the newcomers to the new campus describe themselves as unchurched.

Seeing itself as a regional church, **Mecklenburg** wants to extend into areas where the church has a foothold, but is outside a 20-minute drive time to the main campus. “We envision opening several more satellites around the Charlotte area,” explains Jeff. “There are virtually no other churches targeting the un-churched, and we want to lead the way.”

Southside Community Church, Surrey, BC, Canada, developed a similar attitude of using multiple campuses to go to where the people are. In 1993 Cam and Shelley Roxburgh planted **Southside** in a very poor neighborhood. One of the key ingredients in Southside’s launch was the fact that the core group moved into the neighborhood itself. “This made all the difference,” explains Cam. “The church grew very quickly and was soon packed out. Those who lived here did a great job with incarnational ministry, but the people coming from farther away had a hard time being incarnational with their neighbors.”

The discovery prompted Cam to ask, “If God can do this in this neighborhood, why not in another neighborhood?”

So after going to two services, the leadership team decided to launch another congregation in a new neighborhood where a key group of the church’s core people were living. It began in 1997. By the year 2000, both congregations had grown and the time came to launch two new ones. By the spring of 2000, Southside had become one church with four congregations.

For **Southside**, multi-site is a necessary foundation for community transformation. “From day one it was planting a church that would plant churches. Then it evolved into planting a church that

would launch *local congregations*,” he says.

Why is community transformation so important? “We don’t want merely to see people come to Christ, but for neighborhoods to be transformed as a result,” says Cam. “We’re working hard to be the focal point of each community we’re in. People are starting to attribute good things happening in the community to our church. That comes to pass only when we live and minister where they are.”

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C Opportunity. Other churches become multi-site when they face an *opportunity that matches their mission*. Such was the case with the first off-campus site of **Stillwater United Methodist Church**, Dayton, OH. As Executive Director Karen Seiter summarizes the breakthrough, “God literally dropped this in our lap.”

The surprise began when a YMCA vice president asked the church to donate funds toward a new YMCA in the area. Duane Anders, the lead pastor at the church, whose worship attendance has grown from 35 to over 600 during his 9 years there, teased the vice president in reply. Duane commented that the church also needed new space, and they should come together in their construction dreams. “I was really just blowing off some steam,” Duane says. [ENDNOTE: For the complete story, see Duane Anders, “Planting Churches through Partnerships” April 2003 *Net Results*, 3, 10, www.netresults.org]

The vice president took him seriously, affirming the number of church-YMCA

partnerships already happening in the Dayton area. Surprised, Duane asked if there might be openness to a partnership with this new YMCA. The answer was yes. Duane immediately phoned his district superintendent to suggest that other United Methodist churches, especially those closer to the new YMCA site, might want to jump at this opportunity. "I even offered that our church would give away 50 people," he says.

None were able to respond in time, so **Stillwater** decided to accept the challenge themselves. They became one church in two locations. They wrote a lease that put the pastor's office in the building and a church sign on the property. They put together a band and worship team that could play at the new YMCA campus. Once the campus was launched, the church even got a page in the program booklet the Y mails to every home in the community. When potential YMCA members are given a walk-through, the tour guide introduces them to Campus Pastor John Alice, saying, "This is our pastor; a church meets here on Sunday mornings." The church has full use of the building Sunday morning from 7:00 a.m. until noon, and once a month it gets the full facility on a Saturday or Sunday evening.

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– Duane Anders

This amazing collaboration boils down to a good relationship, according to Duane. "We told the Y we don't want to be renters, but partners in your ministry. And they are wide open to us as we help the YMCA fulfill the spiritual aspect of their mission statement."

Duane still marvels at the incredible opportunity that came their way. "Livingwater has a chance to reach out to those who would not normally find themselves in a

typical church experience but would be willing to check out their spiritual curiosity in a more neutral site, such as the YMCA," he summarizes.

Jacksonville Chapel, Lincoln Park, NJ, is another church that recognized an opportunity to match its mission. Their main campus, built by adding onto a once-rural chapel and adjacent farmhouse, consists of 10 different buildings. None are readily suitable for expansion, nor is the parking arrangement conducive to the growing crowds.

Yet the attendance was increasing and church leaders had a strong desire to expand the mission. Then the idea came: Why not avoid the cost of new construction by becoming one church with multiple locations?

Putting that idea to work from 2001 to 2003, **Jacksonville Chapel** grew from 1 to 5 venues per week. It involved a shift to multiple services in the main sanctuary, use of the "Nxt-Gen" building (on the opposite end of the campus from the worship auditorium) for a Spanish-language service on Sunday mornings, and the merger of an existing church a few miles away. EPIC, an onsite GenX ministry (twentysomethings both single and married), also began holding a weekly worship service on Wednesday nights in the "Nxt-Gen" building.

The current way of resourcing the sites is just as creative. "We have developed a teaching team which rotates between sites, and we have developed three worship bands that rotate weeks and locations," explains Warren Hunt, pastor of worship and arts.

Looking ahead, Senior Pastor Phil Hotsenpiller anticipates an ongoing addition of new venues. "We have a 20-acre campus with a lot of buildings, so it is natural to use one or more for a video

venue,” he says. “Also in our area, movement through merger-acquisition is wise since so many big church facilities now run 100 or less.”



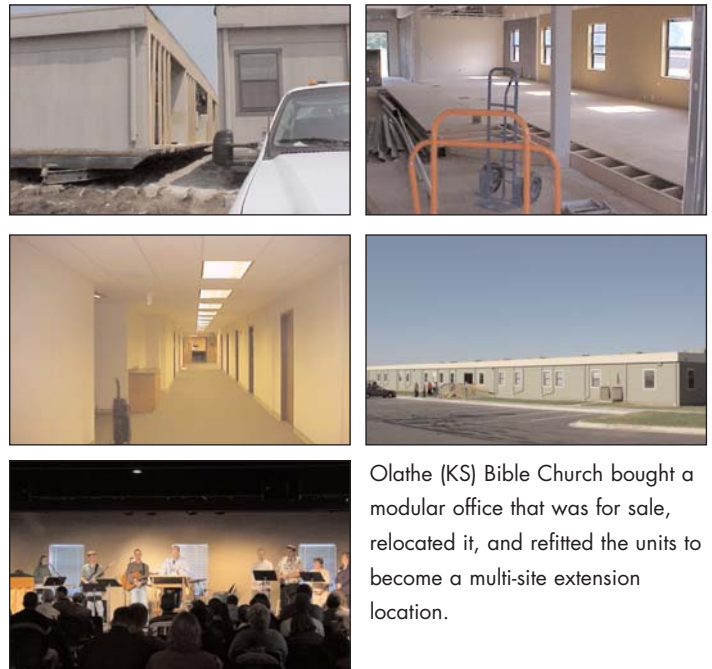
Jacksonville Chapel, Lincoln Park, NJ, is brimming with young families (left), but many area churches are not, prompting Jacksonville Chapel toward a merger idea, and resulting in their new Crossroads Campus (right).

D Mission clarification. A final trigger event for going multi-site is an internal struggle with value alignment. The outcome can be a mission clarification and decision to develop multiple campuses.

Olathe (KS) Bible Church regularly spoke of multiplying its impact, such as building a network of churches. The church summarizes its mission as “Leading people to passionately follow Jesus.” In 1997, it had successfully planted a church seven miles away. Now in 2003, with the church plant moving into a permanent home, what was next for Olathe? “Our goal is not to have a bigger church but a transformed community for Jesus Christ,” explains Rex Bonar, lead pastor. **Olathe** didn’t have a lack-of-space issue, so much as a desire to reach out.

As they looked around they became aware of a situation in Gardner, a community 12 miles away. “We decided that Gardner was growing, no one else was going there to start a church, and a 15,000-square-foot Sprint building was available,” says Rex. “It was an opportunity consistent with our values, but we didn’t know whether our staff and elder infrastructure were ready to move into the increased opportunities for ministry outreach.”

Was this the right time and the best opportunity? Mike Bickley, pastor of ministry development, explains the decision-making process: “The situation became a forcing of our values, challenging us to step up to the plate and live consistently with our values. We went to Gardner because of opportunity.” In fact, it seemed almost too opportune to miss, since the comparatively low-cost portable facilities could potentially become a “portable church kit” as they launch additional campuses.



Olathe (KS) Bible Church bought a modular office that was for sale, relocated it, and refitted the units to become a multi-site extension location.

Bethlehem Baptist Church, Minneapolis, MN, went through a similar time of soul-searching but on an even larger scale. To manage growth and expand ministry, this downtown church rented space at a college on the north side of town from October 2002 to May 2003. Some 40 percent of the congregation made the location shift. Since most of Bethlehem’s preaching came from one pastor, John Piper, both campuses got to experience the same live sermon each week, thanks to a process of live microwave transmission. The preaching pastor rotated between the two sites from week to week.

At the summer 2003 evaluation point, the elders called the church to fast and pray. According to Kenny Stokes, pastor for church planting and strategic mobilization, the call to intercession represented a crisis in which the church's leadership was asking, "Is this who we are?"

Historically, the church had never put much priority on suburban ministry, which now felt awkward. **Bethlehem** had given a lot of energy to cross-cultural ministry overseas and also to those who lived very near to the church's downtown urban facility. But what about the suburbs in between, such as the ministries taking root through the suburban college site? Wouldn't pursuit of a suburban ministry represent a denial of who the church is?"

The church kept coming back to its mission which involves "spreading passion for the supremacy of God in all things for the joy of all peoples through Jesus Christ."

The outcome, after the season of prayer and fasting, was to conclude that if this is our mission statement, and if God has given the grace to open the suburban campus, then **Bethlehem** will pursue the multiplying of congregations, churches, and campuses—including one on the north side of the Twin Cities. "The summer crisis became the occasion for God to give us a much broader vision," Kenny summarizes. "We realized that it's incomplete to say we're only an urban, near-neighborhood ministry."



Bethlehem Baptist prayed and fasted for an extended time over the summer of 2003, seeking God's mind as to which way to go with their experiment of the multi-site location.

By fall the college rental had been extended and the preaching has continued to rotate from one site to the other every other Sunday, with video being used at the alternating campus. (The off-site location now uses DVD recordings of the new Saturday-evening service rather than live transmission, and separate

worship teams now lead separate worship services.)

A final example of mission clarification also led to a multi-site approach to church. In 1996, Joel Hunter had vision of a new way of viewing the church he pastored just outside Orlando, FL. His vision led to a new name the next year: **Northland, A Church Distributed**. The idea is that God has given Northland the foundation to become a church that both connects and distributes the ministry of Jesus Christ across geographical boundaries.

The dream is for the church to meet in multiple locations, with various sites developing unique personalities yet sharing the same DNA and brand identity. The every-week model of this idea are the two locations a mile apart that are interdependent, integrated, and even concurrent in how they worship with one worship band spread across the two different locations. Through the use of specialized technical expertise, the church connects real-time worship such that a worship leader can be on one site and the instrumentalists or supporting vocalists at another site. "We try to erase the walls between the buildings so you're not aware and then don't care that you're in two different places," explains Neil Morrison, the church's technical director.

For **Northland**, the vision of being a distributed church goes far beyond its local greater Orlando geography. The church's first concurrent worship was with a church in New Hampshire in 1998. Later that year it did live worship with a church in Nambia, Africa. The week after the September 11, 2001, suicide attacks, Northland worshipped with a sister 1,500-person congregation in Cairo, Egypt. "This caused us to see a very different world as they prayed for us, wept for us, and tried to help us understand the similar kinds of grief that they experience continually," says

Greg Kannon, a minister of multi-site development.

As a result of seeing itself as a church distributed across many different sites, “Our staff have become developers and equippers,” Greg says. “Our vision is to see people coming to Christ and growing in him as we link local and global communities for ministry and worship everywhere, every day. We are a church that calls people to maturity in Christ and to distribute their lives daily in ministry to others.”

Section 2, The Decision to Add Another Site. Once a church has launched a second venue or location, what causes it to do so a third, fourth, or fifth time? A multi-site church sustains its momentum only if the values behind its multi-site commitment are part of the church’s ongoing DNA. The headway and momentum will continue only if there is widespread ownership of the value, “This is how our church does ministry.” In other words, too many churches start their second, third, or fourth venue with the greatest intentions, but they don’t finish well. Looking back, they make assessments like this: (see chart on page 14)

- “We didn’t have adequate goal ownership among our leadership”
- “We had too many other new initiatives in motion, and the additional site got somewhat forgotten”
- “We didn’t give enough support to the face-with-the-place campus pastor”
- “We didn’t instill in our people a sense that this is who we are, so they treated the new site as a temporary stop-gap measure, not something to bring friends to, invest in, and treat as a church home”
- “We funded start-up costs, but didn’t anticipate how to underwrite the new site’s ongoing financial needs”

- “We got them launched, thanked God for the success, assumed all was well, and then moved to something new.”

In all of these situations, the parent congregation or its leaders didn’t place enough sense of mission, vision, or value on the additional site. The new sites weren’t durable because leaders had acted like a church “with” an extra location, rather than truly a church “of” multiple locations. The church still hadn’t settled issues of its new identity as one church in multiple locations.

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Once the “should we?” question is settled, often the next issue is “when?” Here are several approaches.

- 1 Start Another When Circumstances Are the Same.** A natural tendency is to look at what worked and then repeat the same sequence. For example, after **Stillwater United Methodist Church’s** great experience with the YMCA, all they needed to hear was these words: “By the way, we’re building another Y—do you want to be part of it?” Duane Anders is now both lead pastor at Stillwater and also Dayton North District Superintendent. Using the slogan, “where there’s a Y there’s a way,” he’s on the lookout for new opportunities at YMCAs, either for Stillwater or on behalf of other area churches. “We hope to launch 2 more sites in the next five years and to help 3 other churches launch second sites,” he says.

The potential downside is to stay in the safety zone of what is known. Jeff Sheets of **Mecklenburg** voices the sentiment of many when he affirms, “I want to feel we are always doing things that must have an element that says, ‘If God is not in it, it will fail.’”

Multi-Site Variations: Models from Twelve Different Churches

NOTE: Full names and web addresses are at the beginning of this document.	Bethlehem	Chapel	Community	Evergreen	Garden	Jacksonville	Mecklenburg	Northland	Olathe	Southside	Stillwater	Windermere
Basic Facts												
Year church started	1800s	1934	1800s	1988	1953	1939	1992	1965	1980	1992	1800s	1967
Year church became multi-site (second site/venue launched)	2002	2002	2002	1994	1995	2002	2003	2001	2002	1998	2002	2000
Year launched third site/venue	not yet	not yet	2004 (proj)	1997	2003	2003	not yet	2004 (proj)	not yet	2000	2004 (proj)	2004 (proj)
Total number of different <u>venues</u> each week 12/03	2	2	2	5	3	3	2	2	2	4	2	2
Total number of <u>services</u> each week 12/03	5	6	6	7	11	5	4	9	3	4	5	5
Total worship <u>attendance</u> , all sites, average 2003	2,600	7,000	1,850	2,600	4,000	1,350	3,000	7,000	2,250	450	700	1,400
Specific Variations												
1. Have venue(s) <u>off</u> premises?	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
2. Have additional venues(s) <u>on</u> premises?	N	N	Y	N	N	Y	N	N	N	N	N	N
3. Use <u>live</u> simulcast preaching?	Y [^]	N	N	N	Y	N	N	Y	N	N	N	N
4. Use <u>recorded</u> teaching (video)?	N	N	Y	N	Y	N	Y	N	N	N	N	N
5. Use <u>concurrent</u> (live two-way) worship?	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	Y	N	N	N	N
6. Similar or identical teaching content at each site?	Y	Y	Y	N	N	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	N	N
7. Do preachers frequently rotate between sites?	Y	Y	N	N	N	Y	N	Y	Y	Y	N	N
8. Launched any sites other than English language?	N*	N	N	N	N	Y**	N	N	N	N	N	N
9. Have also planted new church(es)?	Y	Y	Y	Y***	N	Y	N	Y	Y	Y***	Y	N

^ Live video microwave broadcasts were discontinued in 2003 when the church began videotaping its new Saturday-night service.

*Bethlehem Baptist Church was originally a Swedish-language church. It was organized in 1871 as First Swedish Baptist Church of Minneapolis. In 1893, bi-monthly services in English were added. The Swedish services were discontinued in the 1930s.

**Jacksonville Chapel launched a Spanish-language service in 2002.

***Church planting has been in another country (overseas) only



TOM MCGEHEE

Tom McGehee, a collaboration expert and founder of The WildWorks Group (www.wildworksgroup.com), regularly cautions churches about staying only in the arena of what they've done before. "The hardest model to change is one that works," he says. "Honest conversation about what 'could be' is often the most difficult to create."

2 Start Another When It Seems You Must. The Garden was maxed out for some time in their dinner theater location. They looked and prayed hard for what to do. "In a serendipitous kind of timing," says Linda McCoy, "a man in the congregation went looking for a new business for himself that could also become a new branch for the Garden." He bought a catering house, the church connected a T1 video line to it, and in January 2003 the church began a service via live-video feed. Worship is led on-premises but the sermon comes over from the dinner theater. By the end of 2003 attendance at the new site had grown to almost 200. "We got out of the church box and into a new box," comments Linda. "Now we're asking how to color outside the lines of the box we've created!"

3 Start Another When You're Full Again. "We'll start another new service or location after we're 200 in number," says **Southside's** Cam Roxburgh. "Last time we started too early because the ministries we left behind weren't fully functioning, or even almost ready to function on their own."

"Full" doesn't mean simply the crowd in the big service. Almost every church that's flourishing in multiple locations has a strong underlying small-groups ministry. A network of effective small groups seems essential for successful multi-site ministry.

As Cam Roxburgh affirms, "The number of people in home groups is all-important. In a

fun way we are fighting in-house over which area will be the next launch, and it's based on who's developing the most home groups."

4 Start Another on a Timeline. Some churches, like **Jacksonville Chapel**, simply don't know when to launch again. They're too new at it. What they do know is that they are going to push that way. "I'm assuming it will take about 12 months between each launch," says Phil Hotsenpiller, senior pastor. The church will simply plan and unfold that way until they learn something better.

5 Start Another When You're Got New Leadership Ready. Others, such as **Community Presbyterian Church**, have similar timeline hopes, but will make the final decision only if staffing issues have been solved. They gauge their readiness by whether they can have a leadership team in place. "We've done some rhythm thinking of one new site a year, benchmarked against burnout," says Scott Farmer. "The biggest issue is whether we've got leadership for it. When you've got that, the rest follows." This means not just the up-front leadership, but also supporting leaders, such as for the all-important role of small groups.

"THE BIGGEST ISSUE IS WHETHER WE'VE GOT LEADERSHIP FOR IT. WHEN YOU'VE GOT THAT, THE REST FOLLOWS."

— Scott Farmer.

Olathe Bible Church is all about leadership development as a church, including the benchmarks it looks toward in launching a new site or church plant: "The more sites you have, the more leadership opportunities you have," says Rex Bonar. "Leadership development is at the core of who we are, so we want to create something that forces us to reproduce leaders. We want each campus to think, 'We are here to multiply, build a network of churches, and have our greatest impact possible.'"

Leadership development is indeed the

ALMOST EVERY CHURCH THAT'S FLOURISHING IN MULTIPLE LOCATIONS HAS A STRONG UNDERLYING SMALL-GROUPS MINISTRY.

make-or-break factor for many churches doing multi-site ministry. For a complete report on how churches are developing leaders for multi-site contexts, see “The Leader-Making Challenge,” a concept paper from Leadership Network available at www.leadnet.org/multisitechurchesResources.asp).

Section 3, Looking Down the Road

What’s new about multi-site today? It’s been around for centuries—think of Methodist circuit riders and branch Sunday schools done by bus ministry. But digital technologies, combined with growing social acceptance of branch-church ideas, have made a new movement possible.



BILL EASUM

“The multi-site movement will explode over the next few decades,” says Bill Easum, principal church consultant for Easum, Bandy, and Associates (www.easumbandy.com) and author of several books including *Beyond the Box:*

Innovative Churches That Work. [co-authored with Dave Travis, Group Publishing, 2003] Why? “It is how the church grew in the early centuries and it is how the church is exploding in other parts of the world in cell and house churches. Churches with limited land and a Great Commission mindset will find multi-site the most economic way to be faithful and grow.”

Easum sees several issues multi-sites will need to deal with as they grow and mature:

- Long-time members of established churches will need to be convinced that they and the mother-church location will not be forgotten
- The additional strain on paid staff will have to be addressed

- The paid staff will need to develop higher competency, learn how to equip and reproduce themselves, and cultivate a high level of trust between lead pastor and multi-site staff
- Communication and technological links between campuses are critical.

Easum is convinced the movement has great significance for the future. “I get as excited about this movement as I do the church planting movements underway,” he says. “It is not just another program *du jour*. It is a way of life; a way of responding to God’s call to be the church.”

It seems that doing church with a multi-site perspective seems only to increase people’s vision. One member of the Multi-Site Churches Leadership Community Group Two affirms that he’s drawn “to be a part of a movement of churches who are innovative and risk-oriented in their approach to reach people for Christ.” Another wakes up each morning invigorated by the idea of “transforming the world one community at a time,” with the multi-site approach being essential to those transformations.

As Charles Arn affirms, “The satellite church is just the next—and not likely the last—step that builds on the way Jesus went from town to town, and sent his disciples to do the same, in order to introduce the Gospel to as many as possible. Perhaps it’s time for more churches to take a look around at what God is blessing and simply do more of it.”

“CHURCHES WITH LIMITED LAND AND A GREAT COMMISSION MINDSET WILL FIND MULTI-SITE THE MOST ECONOMIC WAY TO BE FAITHFUL AND GROW.”

– Bill Easum



WARREN BIRD



GREG LIGON

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