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THE MULTI-SITE CHURCH PHENOMENON IN
NORTH AMERICA: 1950-2010

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Brian Nathaniel Frye

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APPROVAL SHEET

THE MULTI-SITE CHURCH PHENOMENON IN
NORTH AMERICA: 1950-2010

Brian Nathaniel Frye

Read and Approved by:

Charles E. Lawless, Jr. (Chair)

J. D. Payne

Timothy K. Beougher

Date _____

To my God and Savior,
who created me, who saved me, and who loves me,
and to Heidi, who I love, treasure, and honor as my greatest friend,
who has sacrificed so much to make this project possible,
and to Ian, Scott, and Connor, who complete our mighty Frye Tribe,
and to our parents, Wes and Donna, Lloyd and Ferne,
who have loved and encouraged us immensely throughout our journey.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS	vii
LIST OF TABLES	viii
LIST OF FIGURES	ix
PREFACE	x
Chapter	
1. INTRODUCTION TO THE MULTI-SITE CHURCH PHENOMENON	1
Statement of Research Problem	11
Background of the Proposal	18
Author Bias	21
Research Questions	23
Research Methodology	24
Research Limitations and Delimitations	28
2. HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENTS IN THE MULTI-SITE CHURCH PHENOMENON	32
Introduction	32
Historical Examples of Multi-Site Church Features in North America	33
Conclusion	61
3. CATALYTIC FACTORS INSTRUMENTAL TO THE EMERGENCE OF THE MULTI-SITE CHURCH	63

Chapter	Page
Introduction	63
Three Catalytic Factors in the Emergence of Multi-Site Churches	63
Conclusion	92
4. THE EMERGENCE OF MULTI-SITE CHURCHES	94
Introduction	94
The Multi-Site Church Primogenitor	95
The Multi-Site Church Revolution: 1990-2009	104
Conclusion	116
5. DEFINITION AND CATEGORIZATION OF MULTI-SITE CHURCH MODELS	118
Introduction	118
Overview of Models and Current Multi-Site Categorizations	118
Multi-Site Model Descriptions and Examples	120
Formulating a Multi-Site Taxonomy	138
Conclusion	178
6. BIBLICAL AND THEOLOGICAL BOUNDARIES FOR DEVELOPING HEALTHY CHURCHES, WITH APPLICATION TO MULTI-SITE CHURCH MODELS	180
Introduction	180
Does the Multi-Site Church Approach Fit within the Framework of Scripture?	182
Is the Multi-Site Church Approach a Market Driven Phenomenon?	190

Chapter	Page
Organizing: How Do We Structure Our Polity?	194
Fellowshipping (Gathering): How Do We Distribute a Congregation?	216
Preaching: How Do We Proclaim the Word?	230
Pastoring: How Do We Shepherd the People?	246
Multiplying: How Do We Plant More Churches?	261
Conclusion	292
7. CONCLUSION	293
BIBLIOGRAPHY	327

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

ARPANET	Advanced Research Project Agency Network
COTW	Church on the Way, Van Nuys, California
DARPA	Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency
EGPC	Extended Geographical Parish Church
FBCD	First Baptist Church Dallas
FBC	First Baptist Church
IMB	International Mission Board
ISC	Indigenous Satellite Unit
ISU	Indigenous Satellite Church
LN	Leadership Network
NAMB	North American Mission Board

LIST OF TABLES

Table		Page
1.	Numeric increase of television sets and television stations in the United States between 1946 and 1955	87
2.	Early multi-site church adopters	107
3.	Lyle Schaller’s “seven most highly visible multi-site expressions” (1994)	124
4.	Bill Easum and Dave Travis’ “7 effective [multi-site] approaches” (2003)	128
5.	Geoff Surratt, Greg Ligon, and Warren Bird’s “five [multi-site] models” (2006)	132
6.	Rodney Harrison, Tom Cheyney, and Don Overstreet’s “major approaches to the multi-site church” (2008)	135
7.	Proposed multi-site taxonomy	179

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure	Page
1. Proximity scale of multi-site location	141
2. Multiple venues summary	142
3. Localized multi-sites summary	144
4. Regional multi-sites summary	146
5. Extended multi-sites summary	148
6. Multi-location preaching approaches	151
7. Rover preaching approach summary	152
8. Rotation preaching approach summary	154
9. Collaborative preaching approach summary	156
10. Video preaching approach summary	161
11. Proxy preaching approach summary	162
12. Primary methods of multi-siting process	165
13. Summary of relocating multi-siting process	167
14. Summary of adopting multi-siting process	168
15. Summary of mothering multi-siting process	170
16. Summary of replicating multi-siting process	172
17. Summary of venueing multi-siting process	173
18. Summary of cross-culturing multi-siting process	175
19. Summary of partnering multi-siting process	176

PREFACE

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Brian Nathaniel Frye

Delaware, Ohio

May 2011

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION TO THE MULTI-SITE CHURCH PHENOMENON

Introduction

On September 11, 2001, Leadership Network of Dallas, Texas, assembled in Naperville (Chicago), Illinois, a group of sixty-five church leaders and researchers from around the United States and Canada. The goal of this gathering was to evaluate a growing trend appearing across the North American church landscape: the multi-site/multi-campus church phenomenon.¹ This meeting was not the starting point for the multi-site church idea—churches have employed and experimented with variations of multiple location or point ministry throughout the last century.² This forum event was, however, a milestone for the multi-site church concept, seemingly transitioning it from merely an observed ecclesiastical phenomenon to a recognized church movement within

¹Dave Travis, “Multi-Site/Multi-Campus Churches: Report from a Leadership Network Forum – September 11-12, 2001,” 1; accessed 14 March 2006; available from <http://www.leadnet.org>; Internet.

²A more detailed analysis of historic multiple site church practices and structures will ensue in the next chapter. Examples of this phenomenon may be seen in the following: clustering congregations, yoked congregations, multi-parish or circuit churches, federated churches, key church strategy churches, off campus institutional ministries, base churches, multi-congregational churches, multi-housing congregations, and indigenous satellite churches to name a few. See Charles M. Olsen, *The Base Church: Creating Community through Multiple Forms* (Atlanta: Forum House, 1973); Carl S. Dudley, *Making the Small Church Effective* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1978); Lyle E. Schaller, *The Small Church Is Different!* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1982); Robert L. Wilson, *The Multi-Church Parish* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1989); Bill Easum, *Dancing with Dinosaurs: Ministry in a Hostile and Hurting World* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1993); Lyle Schaller, *Innovations in Ministry: Models for the 21st Century* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1994); J. Timothy Ahlen and J. V. Thomas, *One Church, Many Congregations: The Key Church Strategy* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1999); Bill Easum and Dave Travis, *Beyond the Box: Innovative Churches that*

the North American church.

What Is a Multi-Site Church?

Since the 1990s, an increasing number of churches have begun exploring the multi-site concept—the idea of becoming “one church that meets in multiple locations.” While this definition may seem simple enough, over the last two decades several voices have worked to bring clarity to what the multi-site idea entails.

In 1990, it seems that Elmer Towns was the first to present a general definition for multi-site churches. Though Towns used a different nomenclature to describe the churches within his writings, branding them “Extended Geographical Parish Churches” (EGPCs), the results of his analysis demonstrate that the EGPC and the multi-site church designations are likely two names for the same phenomenon.³ Towns explained,

An extended geographic parish church is spread out over a large area so that it: 1) meets in several locations, 2) operates different ministries in different locations and has expanded its location geographically in order to reach a larger Jerusalem. Another way of describing this concept is: 1) multiple ministries, 2) multiple places of ministry, 3) multiple ministers, but 4) one central organization and one senior pastor.⁴

Within three years, Bill Easum offered a definition for “multiple-site campus” churches that while somewhat nebulous, helps to capture the metamorphosis of multi-site understanding and description in the early 1990s. According to Easum, “These [multiple-site campus] experiments are called satellites, or geographically expanded (or perimeter)

Work (Loveland, CO: Group, 2003); and David Crocker, *Operation Inasmuch: Mobilizing Believers beyond the Wall of the Church* (St. Louis: Lake Hickory Resources, 2005).

³Elmer Towns, *An Inside Look at 10 of Today's Most Innovative Churches: What They're Doing, How They're Doing It, & How You Can Apply Their Ideas to Your Church* (Ventura, CA: Regal, 1990), 238-41.

⁴*Ibid.*, 236-37.

parish churches. They operate on the hub and spoke concept with one central congregation and many branch congregations.”⁵

A decade later, Bill Easum and Dave Travis together offered a clearer and more concise definition than Easum had previously. They concluded that, “[a multi-site church] meets in many locations but has the same core values, mission, administration, budget, treasury, and staff as a single site church.”⁶ This definition reflects more clearly what the multi-site church concept has become.⁷ Here more emphasis is placed on a

⁵Easum, *Dancing with Dinosaurs*, 92. Note Easum’s use of Towns’ “Extended Geographic Parish Church” language.

⁶Easum and Travis, *Beyond the Box*, 85.

⁷Easum and Travis present a series of seven different “approaches” to doing multi-site in their *Beyond the Box* work. These include (1) the apostle approach (the pastor is an apostolic leader who oversees multiplication of new congregations, possibly with the goal of creating a movement of networked churches; see Dave Ferguson’s NewThing Network, www.newthing.org); (2) the video venue approach (additional sites are created with different ambiance and style in mind, but with the same sermon or service via video; see Larry Osborne’s video café: www.videocafes.org); (3) the rent approach (all sites are rented locations; no worship space is owned; see Evergreen Community Church: www.evegreenc.com); (4) the apartment approach (church worship gatherings are held in small cells/Bible studies across city or community in various settings; see Tillie Burgin’s Mission Arlington: www.missionarlington.org); (5) the mainline approach (employed by older mainline churches when they are landlocked, seeking to expand their mission, or targeting a specified demographic; see Upper Arlington Lutheran Church: www.ualc.org); (6) the small church approach (is similar to the mainline approach above, but on a smaller scale; see First United Methodist Church, Sedalia, MO: www.firstsayyes.com); and (7) the strong church weak church approach (the strong church assimilates or absorbs a hurting or weak congregation, providing staff, leadership, programming, and direction; see Lord of Life Lutheran Church: www.lordoflifelutheran.com). Easum and Travis, *Beyond the Box*, 85-96.

Lyle Schaller also provides a classification or “variations of the basic [multi-site church] concept.” According to Schaller, “The seven most highly visible expression of the multi-site are (a) the downtown church with the satellite which is little more than a preaching point, not a seven day a week ministry center; (b) the urban church with two or three or four off campus meeting places; (c) the use of this option as one step in an extend relocation process; (d) the predominately black central-city congregation and the predominately Anglo suburban congregation; (e) as a product of the Key Church Strategy... [key church reaches out with Bible studies and satellite Sunday schools into populations that would not or could not come to the building housing the congregation, including: ethnic minorities, prisoners, apartment community residents, and the hearing impaired], (f) as an expression of large congregational care for wounded birds . . . ; and (g) as a practical strategy for ‘mothering’ new missions [variation of apartment or mainline approach described above].” Schaller, *Innovations in Ministry*, 121. Finally, Stephen Shields presents five models of multi-site churches in a leadership network publication. They are: (1) the Regional Campus Model, (2) the Video Venue Model, (3) the Teaching Team Model, (4) the Low Risk Model, and (5) the Partnership Model. Stephen Shields, “2007 Survey of 1,000 Multi-site Churches: Latest Insights on a Growing Movement,” Leadership Network, 9 [on-line]; accessed 22 May 2006; available from <http://www.leadnet.org>; Internet.

multi-site church being a single church than upon multiple ministries and multiple congregations. By 2003, then, it seems that the primary understanding of what a multi-site church was (and was not) became fixed. In 2005, Warren Bird followed the Easum and Travis formulation as he moved beyond mere definition to explain how a church moves from being a single-site to a multi-site church:

A church becomes multi-site when it offers additional worship services in new locations, such as at another church, nursing home, prison, gym, converted warehouse, or school. For many churches, the worship service is only the beginning of their multi-site expression. A new sight or venue may be nothing more than a worship team with guitar, plus a speaker (live or recorded) with a message from God's word. But the additional site can also encompass an almost endless variety of supportive ministries—as varied as they are of different types of people to receive the ministry.⁸

Finally, in 2006, Geoff Surratt, Greg Ligon, and Warren Bird together offered a definition of a multi-site church that incorporates both the diversity of the various churches employing multi-site practices and the unifying factors that they share in common. They ask (and then answer), “What is a multi-site church? A multi-site church is one church meeting in multiple locations—different rooms on the same campus, different locations in the same region, or in some instances, different cities, states, or nations. A multi-site church shares a common vision, budget, leadership, and board.”⁹

It is this definition that best describes the multi-site church phenomenon, verifying the simple idea that a multi-site church is one single church, operating as a single organization, meeting in different locations. With a basic understanding of multi-

⁸Warren Bird, “One Church in Many Locations: What Multi-Site Churches Do in Addition to Worship,” *Leadership Network* (2005), 2 [on-line]; accessed 22 May 2006; available from <http://www.leadnet.org>; Internet.

⁹Geoff Surratt, Greg Ligon, and Warren Bird, *The Multi-Site Church Revolution: Being One Church . . . in Many Locations* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2006), 18.

site churches established, it is now fitting to turn to the question of how many churches are employing this type of structure in North America.

From Multi-Site Phenomenon to a Multi-Site Movement?

Little concrete information is available at this point as to a specific starting point of the multi-site church idea. Easum and Travis, in *Beyond the Box: Innovative Churches that Work*, link it directly to the development and expansion of the early church. Labeling the form “untethered church,” the authors explain,

It reminds us of the church of the first century that met in homes throughout a city. Instead of relying on a location, the untethered church relies on mission and penetration into many corners of the community. Whereas the church-in-a-city movement relies on a variety of congregations to reach a city together, the [untethered church] movement . . . stresses one congregation growing in multiple locations.¹⁰ [emphasis original]

Others like Roger Finke, coauthor of *The Churching of America, 1776-2005: Winners and Losers in Our Religious Economy*, argue that a variation of the current multi-site framework became visible in the circuit riding preacher era of the 1800s.¹¹ Warren Bird reasons similarly, linking the birth of the multi-site concept to John Wesley and Methodism:

The idea of becoming one church in multiple locations is not new. Circuit-riding Methodist pioneer John Wesley did it by horseback in the 1700s, with his followers doing likewise in the 1800s, helping Methodism spread far faster than any other denomination. Methodists started classes that functioned as local churches but

¹⁰Easum and Travis, *Beyond the Box*, 85.

¹¹Bob Smietana quotes Finke from an interview explaining, “The Methodist circuit rider was basically the pastor for multiple satellite churches.” Bob Smietana, “High Tech Circuit Riders: Satellite Churches Are Discovering a New Way to Grow the Body of Christ,” *Christianity Today* (September 2005): 63.

were under the oversight of a circuit rider who served local towns.¹²

While circuit-riding and the “churches” it spawned may be similar to present multi-site churches, the evidence suggests that multi-site churches (as defined above) began later, likely in the middle of the twentieth century as a confluence of several social developments took place. Towns explains the emergence of the multi-site church idea in the United States stemming from a growing urban mindset and a “consumer approach to ministry.”¹³ Lyle Schaller’s research validates Towns’ conclusion. In *Discontinuity and Hope: Radical Change and the Path to the Future*, Schaller concisely details the dawn of branch banking and the principles that led banks to take their goods and services to their constituency and customer base. He then parallels branch banking methods to methods utilized by downtown churches in the 1920s who sought to establish “outpost Sunday schools.” Schaller’s findings thus display an important connection between these outposts and the autonomous congregations to which the Sunday schools would eventually evolve.¹⁴

Regardless of when the multi-site church idea first began to appear, by the 1980s multi-site churches were growing in number even though the concept was still in a

¹²Elmer Towns, Ed Stetzer, and Warren Bird, *11 Innovations in the Local Church: How Today’s Leaders Can Learn, Discern, and Move into the Future* (Ventura, CA: Regal Books, 2007), 68. In mapping multi-site concept development, Bird cites First Baptist Church, Hammond, IN, pastored by Jack Hyles, as becoming multi-site “in the mid-1900s” with Hyles’ implementation of child busing: “[Buses] became mobile chapels for thousands of children each week.” Bird also places Mt. Paran Church of God in Atlanta, GA, as becoming multi-site in the 1970s. It is worth noting that in an earlier work, Elmer Towns (Bird’s source) explained that Mt. Paran went to a multi-site model in 1987. See Towns, *10 of Today’s Most Innovative Churches*, 163-73.

¹³Towns, *10 of Today’s Most Innovative Churches*, 237.

¹⁴Lyle E. Schaller, *Discontinuity and Hope: Radical Change and the Path to the Future* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1999), 174-75.

fledgling state of development. Within ten years, by 1990 as Towns notes, momentum of the “movement” had increased such that a growing number of church observers were beginning to recognize the multi-site church form appearing.¹⁵

By 2003, according to Warren Bird (of the Leadership Network), at least one thousand churches were believed to be “multi-site.”¹⁶ In 2005, Leadership Network researchers increased this figure to 1500 churches.¹⁷ Others outside the Leadership Network fold have similarly recognized a burgeoning in the number of churches using the multi-site church approach. In *Outreach* magazine’s “Top 100 Largest and Fastest-Growing U.S. Churches” special issue (2007), John N. Vaughn documents the increasing utilization of the multi-site concept by the top 100 hundred fastest-growing congregations. According to Vaughn, in late 2005 and early 2006 twenty-eight of the

¹⁵Towns cites Willow Creek Community Church, South Barrington, IL; Central Community Church, Wichita, KS; Horizon Christian Fellowship, San Diego, CA; New Hope Community Church, Portland, OR; Church on the Way, Van Nuys, CA; Perimeter Church, Atlanta, GA; and Mount Paran Church of God, Atlanta, GA, but offers more extensive multi-site discussion about the last two churches. Towns, *10 of Today’s Most Innovative Churches*, 164-73, 237-45.

¹⁶This Leadership Network released article entitled, “Survey of 1000 Multi-Site Churches: A Dozen of the Most Significant Findings,” is somewhat misleading. Author Warren Bird explains, “We obtained usable email addresses from 659 of the [1000?] churches, and invited each to participate in an online survey. Of the more than 150 responses, here are the findings” Clearly, 1000 churches were not surveyed in this project, nor were 659 for which email addresses were collected. The survey results represent just over 150 churches based on the author’s explanation of the survey process. Warren Bird, “Survey of 1000 Multi-Site Churches: A Dozen of the Most Significant Findings” Leadership Network, 1 [on-line]; accessed 22 May 2006; available from <http://www.leadnet.org>; Internet.

¹⁷Surratt, Ligon, and Bird, *The Multi-Site Church Revolution*, 9. In the endnote citation, the authors offer important clarification for the 1500 figure: “In personal conversation [10 August 2005], noted church researcher Elmer Towns responded to our ‘1500 multi-site churches’ statement as follows: ‘It all depends on how you define ‘multi-site.’ If you mean multi-worship services on Sunday morning at a separate site, many more than one thousand churches are doing multi-site work. But if you define multi-site to include nursing home services, prison services, mission Sunday schools and/or chapels, then probably the number one thousand is extremely small.’” Ibid., 211. Dave Ferguson, lead pastor of Community Christian Church, Naperville, IL, also cites 1500 as the number of existing multi-site churches. Dave Ferguson, “The Multi-Site Movement: A New and Effective Way to Reach More People for Christ,” *Christianity Today* [on-line]; accessed 22 May 2006; available from <http://www.christianitytoday.com/global/printer.html?bcl/areas/vision-strategy/articles/102605.html>; Internet.

fastest growing churches in the United States were employing multi-site in some form.¹⁸

Tim Morgan and Lindy Lowry's article "America's Most Innovative Churches" lends further credence to the notion of a growing momentum driving the multi-site approach.

Based upon responses from a panel of noteworthy church observers, Morgan and Lowry present their list of the twenty-five most innovative churches in the United States (spring 2007), and of these churches, well over half are multi-site churches.¹⁹

With a growing number of influential and innovative churches embracing the

¹⁸John N. Vaughn, "Today's Megatrends: How Are the Top 100 Congregations Growing, and What Can Your Church Do to Follow Their Lead?" *Outreach* 5 (Special Issue 2006): 24. See also "Megachurch Research" at the Hartford Institute of Religion, available from http://www.hirr.hartsem.edu/megachurch/megachurches_research.html; Internet.

¹⁹*Outreach Magazine* and Granger Community Church pastor Tony Morgan jointly selected and "put together a panel of 12 ministry leaders and experts, who identified those congregations that are embracing a new vision for the Church. [*Outreach* and Morgan] asked each panelist to provide an individual list of what he or she believed to be the top 15 innovative churches in America and used that data to deliver the final list of 25." Panel members were not allowed to nominate their own churches, and the panel collectively nominated 73 different churches for consideration. Their ranked list of "America's Most Innovative Churches" is as follows: (1) LifeChurch.tv, Edmond, OK; (2) Granger Community Church, Granger, IN; (3) North Point Community Church, Alpharetta, GA; (4) Fellowship Church, Grapevine, TX; (5) Mosaic Church, Los Angeles, CA; (6) Seacoast Church, Mount Pleasant, NC; (7) Community Christian Church, Naperville, IL; (8) National Community Church, Washington, DC; (9) Mars Hill Church, Seattle, WA; (10) New Hope Christian Fellowship, Honolulu, HI; (11) Mars Hill Bible Church, Grandville, MI; (12) The Potter's House, Dallas, TX; (13) Crossover Church, Tampa, FL; (14) Church of the Open Door, Maple Grove, MN; (15) Redeemer Presbyterian Church, New York, NY; (16) Healing Place Church, Baton Rouge, LA; (17) The Journey, New York, NY; (18) Saddleback Church, Lake Forest, CA; (19) North Coast Church, Vista, CA; (20) Willow Creek Community Church, South Barrington, IL; (21) Imago Dei Community, Portland, OR; (22) Christ the King Community, Mt. Vernon, WA; (23) Radiant Church, Surprise, AZ; (24) Living Word Christian Center, Forest Park, IL; and (25) The Sanctuary, Santa Clarita, CA.

The panel members include (1) Efre Smith, pastor of The Sanctuary Covenant Church in Minneapolis, MN, and nationally known church consultant for diversity and multi-ethnic issues; (2) Nancy Beach, program director of worship services at Willow Creek Community Church, South Barrington, IL; (3) Brad Abare, assistant vice president and director of communication for the International Church of Foursquare Gospel and founder of church communications website Churchmarketingsucks.com; (4) Mark Batterson, lead pastor of National Community Church, Washington, DC, and founder of the Buzz Conference; (5) Mark Driscoll, founding pastor of Mars Hill Church, Seattle, WA, and president of the Acts 29 Network; (6) Geoff Surratt, network pastor at Seacoast Church, Mount Pleasant, SC, and leader of Leadership Network's facilitation teams; (7) Ed Young, Jr., senior pastor of Fellowship Church, Grapevine, TX; (8) Tim Sanders, former Yahoo! Executive and leadership coach; (9) David Anderson, senior pastor of BridgeWay Community Church, Columbia, MD, and president of multicultural consulting organization BridgeLeader Network; (10) Dawn Nicole Baldwin, church and business marketing strategist of the AspireOne consultant firm; (11) Brad Lomenick, organizer of INJOY's annual Catalyst Conference and the Maximum Impact Simulcast; (12) Perry Noble, senior pastor of NewSpring Church, Anderson, SC. Tony

multi-site concept, authors, event promoters, and church marketers have capitalized on the new idea of the multi-site church.²⁰ In the last several years, new conferences have focused primarily on the multi-site concept;²¹ specialized lectures within the context of larger conference venues have appeared;²² and the publication of books dealing with multi-site related topics is burgeoning.²³

Morgan and Lindy Lowry, "America's Most Innovative Churches," *Outreach* 6, no. 1 (2007): 1-3.

²⁰As of July 2007, the following fifty-one churches were some of those influential and innovative churches employing multi-site: Bethlehem Baptist Church (Minneapolis, MN), Blackhawk Church (Madison, WI), Brethren in Christ Church (Carlisle, PA), Central Christian Church (Henderson, NV), Chartwell Baptist Church (Oakville, Ontario), Christ the King Community Church, (Mount Vernon, WA), Church on the Way (Van Nuys, CA), Community Christian Church (Naperville, IL), Discovery Church (Orlando, FL), Eastern Star (Baptist) Church (Indianapolis, IN), Evergreen Community Church (Burnsville, MN), Fellowship Bible Church (Little Rock, AR), Fellowship Church (Grapevine, TX), First Baptist Church of Springdale (Springdale, AR), First Baptist Church of Windermere (Orlando, FL), First United Methodist Church (Sedalia, MO), Ginghamburg United Methodist Church (Tipp City, OH), Grace Baptist Fellowship (Lynden, WA), Grace Community Church (Tyler, TX), Gulf Breeze United Methodist Church (Gulf Breeze, FL), Harvest Bible Chapel (Rolling Meadows, IL), Healing Place Church (Baton Rouge, LA), Highview Baptist Church (Louisville, KY), Journey Community Church (New York, NY), Lancaster County Bible Church (Manheim, PA), Life Church.Tv (Edmond, OK), Mariners Church (Irvine, CA), Mars Hill (Seattle, WA), McLean Bible Church (Vienna, VA), Mecklenburg Community Church (Charlotte, NC), Menlo Park Presbyterian Church (Menlo Park, CA), Mission Arlington (Arlington, TX), Mosaic (Los Angeles, CA), National Community Church (Washington, DC), New Hope Christian Fellowship Oahu (Honolulu, HI), NewSong Community Church (Irvine, CA), North Coast Church (Vista, CA), North Point Community Church (Atlanta, GA), Northland, A Church Distributed (Longwood, FL), Olathe Bible Church (Olathe, KS), Potter's House (Dallas, TX), Princeton Alliance Church (Plainsboro, NJ), Redeemer Presbyterian (New York, NY), Saddleback Church (Lake Forest, CA), Seacoast Church (Charlestown, SC), Second Baptist Church (Houston, TX), Southeast Christian Church (Louisville, KY), St. Luke's United Methodist Church (Indianapolis, IN), The Chapel (Akron, OH), Upper Arlington Lutheran Church (Columbus, OH), Willow Creek Community Church (South Barrington, IL).

²¹Examples of conferences specifically developed around the multi-site church concept are (1) "Sundays @ North Point" (2005) sponsored by Andy Stanley at North Point Community Church, Alpharetta, Georgia, 2) "Coast to Coast Multi-Site Conference" sponsored by Leadership Network at several venues, 3) "Multi-site New Thing Practicum" and "The Hitchhikers Guide to Multi-Site" sponsored by Dave Ferguson at Community Christian Church, Naperville, IL, 4) "Immersion Workshops" sponsored by Larry Osborne at North Coast Church, Vista, CA, 5) "The Buzz Conference" hosted by National Community Church, Washington, DC

²²See, for example, (1) the 2006 Pastors Conference of the Southern Baptist Convention, (2) the 2006 and 2007 National Church Planting Conferences, (3) the Worship Facilities Conference and Expo 2007, (4) the 2007 Innovative Church Conference, (5) the 2006 National Outreach Convention, and (6) the 2007 National Pastors Convention.

²³See Bill Easum and Pete Theodore, *The Nomadic Church* (Nashville: Abingdon, 2005); Dave Ferguson, Eric Bramlett, and John Ferguson, *The Big Idea: Focus the Message—Multiply the Impact* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2006); Larry Osborne, *Sticky Church* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2008); Neil Cole, *Organic Church: Growing Faith Where Life Happens* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2005); Robert

At present, it seems that the multi-site phenomenon is only beginning to embed within the fabric of the North American church. The future of the phenomenon may be unclear presently, but Schaller suggests that the multi-site approach is more than a passing trend. He elevates the multi-site phenomenon to the level of “movement,” stating that, “We are in the first day of the first week of the [multi-site] movement.”²⁴ Thom Rainer, formerly of the Rainer Group and now president and CEO of LifeWay Christian Resources, also presents a favorable outlook for multi-site and the approach’s potential for evangelistic impact: “We [at the Rainer Group] believe that the multi-campus approach will continue to gain acceptance in the American Church as the growth of this model accelerates.”²⁵

By several indications, the multi-site phenomenon seems to be an important trend in church structure and organization, but how significant is it? Has the multi-site concept actually reached “movement” proportions, as Schaller suggests? Will it “continue to gain acceptance,” and will the model “accelerate” as Rainer avers? Could the multi-site approach bring about a “revolution” in how churches operate in the future? These questions provide a fitting entry point to addressing the research problem to

Lewis and Wayne Cordeiro, *Culture Shift: Transforming Your Church from the Inside Out* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2005); Rex Miller, *The Millennium Matrix: Reclaiming the Past, Reframing the Future of the Church* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2004); Reggie McNeal, *The Present Future: Six Tough Questions for the Church* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2003); Easum and Travis, *Beyond the Box*; Randy Pope, *The Prevailing Church: An Alternative Approach to Ministry* (Chicago: Moody, 2002); Rick Rusaw and Eric Swanson, *The Externally Focused Church* (Loveland, CO: Group, 2004); Michael Slaughter and Warren Bird, *Unlearning Church* (Loveland, CO: Group, 2002); Phil Stevenson, *The Ripple Church: Multiply Your Ministry by Parenting New Churches* (Indianapolis: Wesleyan Publishing House, 2004); Mark Driscoll and Gary Breshears, *Vintage Church: Timeless Truths and Timely Methods* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2008); and Scott McConnell, *Multi-Site Churches: Guidance for the Movement’s Next Generation* (Nashville: B&H, 2009).

²⁴Lyle E. Schaller, telephone interview by author, Louisville, 22 September 2006.

²⁵Thom Rainer, “One Church, Two Locations,” *Outreach* 4, no. 4 (2005): 18.

follow.

Statement of Research Problem

According to Surratt, Ligon, and Bird, the church in the United States and Canada *is* on the cusp of a multi-site church revolution.²⁶ In their book, aptly titled *The Multi-Site Church Revolution*, these authors claim,

The multi-site movement is represented in every area of the country [United States] across many denominations, and in churches of all sizes, especially with attendances of 250 and up. The dramatic growth of interest in the multi-site approach is nothing short of a revolution in how to reach people for Christ.²⁷

The authors contend that “one out of three churches [in North America is] seriously looking into multi-site.”²⁸ Easum and Travis share similar optimism about the future of multi-site churches:

Although multiple sites and venues may not be right for everyone, we’re convinced that their time has come. So many congregations are developing and exploring the multisite option that it would not surprise us if, in twenty five years [2028], multisite congregations were more the norm than the exception.²⁹

As the number of multi-site churches in the United States has grown over the last two decades and the multi-site church idea has gained notoriety, multi-site advocates

²⁶Each of these individuals has been integrally involved in the Leadership Network and its Multi-Site Church Community. Surratt is a pastor of Seacoast Church, in Charleston, SC, and a leader of a subset multi-site community composed of large churches. Ligon is the director of publishing for the Leadership Network and is the architect of the Multi-site Community group concept. Bird is the Leadership Network’s director of research and the most prolific purveyor of multi-site findings. Surratt, Ligon, and Bird, *Multi-Site Church Revolution*, 222-23. Clearly, this triad’s focus in writing this book is the promotion and propagation of the multi-site church phenomenon.

²⁷Ibid., 9.

²⁸Ibid., 12. It is doubtful that one out of every three churches in North America is “seriously” looking into multi-site. Moreover, it may be too much to assume that one third of churches in North America are familiar enough with the multi-site concept to understand and evaluate it.

²⁹Easum and Travis, *Beyond the Box*, 85. Surratt, Ligon, and Bird share this optimistic view about the future expansion of multi-site churches: “Fifty years ago, the one-venue option was the norm. Fifty years from now [2056], we believe multi-venue and multi-site will be the norm.” Surratt, Ligon, and Bird, *Multi-Site Church Revolution*, 10.

have encouraged the church and its leadership to accept and to embrace this novel method of doing church. While Easum and Travis explain that the multi-site approach to ministry is not suited to every church situation,³⁰ they vigorously press for its adoption, to the point of lauding multi-site as the *most* appropriate and favorable way of doing church in the future. It is important to note that the authors' advocacy of the multi-site concept is based upon a short history of application and limited critical investigation.³¹ In short, it appears that Easum and Travis along with other multi-site pundits are working to accelerate the adoption and utilization of the multi-site approach without careful consideration of its implications and effects.³²

In one of the earliest published discussions on multi-site churches, "From Single Campus Ministry to a Multicampus Church" found in *10 of Today's Most Innovative Churches*, Towns poses an interesting question about the multi-site church concept. As he closes the chapter, Towns reflects, "The question remains: Are [extended geographical parish or multi-site churches] a product of the New Testament?"³³ With no further discussion, Towns leaves his reader (and himself) asking, in essence, "Is multi-

³⁰Ibid.

³¹This concern is especially clear in the area of biblical/theological evaluation. See Jeffrey T. Riddle "A Theological Critique of Multi-Site Ministry" (paper presented at the annual meeting of the Evangelical Theological Society, Washington, DC, 17 November 2006; R. Scott Reavely, "An Ecclesiology for Multi-site Churches: Thinking Biblically about the Local Church in Multiple Locations" (D.Min. project, Western Seminary, 2007); and Nick Floyd, "A Multi-Plantation Ministry: Blending A Multi-Site and Church Planting Strategy in the Local Church" (D.Min. project, Liberty Baptist Theological Seminary, 2009).

³²See Gregg R. Allison, "The Multi-site Church Phenomenon: A Biblical, Theological, Historical, and Missional Assessment" (a paper presented at the annual meeting of the Evangelical Theological Society, Providence, RI, 20 November 2008). Though Allison's paper is brief (16 pp), he is among the first to treat seriously biblical/theological aspects of the multi-site church phenomenon.

³³Towns, *10 of Today's Most Innovative Churches*, 245.

site a biblically acceptable church model?” Towns’ question is both problematic and helpful. At least two problems are evident in Towns’ use of the question. The first is how he frames, or more specifically, where he places it. After a discussion of the EGPC in which Towns seems to provide validation for the concept, he concludes the chapter with a dangling question that leaves his audience unsure of whether Towns is favorable toward the concept or if he even considers the model a viable option for churches to consider. Second, either the question itself is worded poorly or it is a poor question. By asking if the EGPC is a “product” of the New Testament, Town creates an incorrect litmus test. Church models are not simply a product of the New Testament.³⁴ Rather, models are produced when definite ecclesiological principles and guidelines are applied within a certain context.³⁵ Craig Van Gelder clarifies this reality:

The New Testament is the starting point for thinking about the organizational life of the church. It describes a rich variety of organizational expressions. The church developed as it expanded into various contexts, which gives us an important clue to its organization. Organization needs to be understood as normative in relation to the purposes it serves, but primarily functional in relation to the particular cultural forms utilized. Particular forms will tend to vary from context to

³⁴George Ladd notes, “It appears likely that there was no normative pattern of church government in the apostolic age, and that the organizational structure of the church is no essential element in the theology of the church. In view of the central theological emphasis to the unity of the church, it is important to understand that unity does not mean organizational uniformity.” George Eldon Ladd, *A Theology of the New Testament*, rev. ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993), 579.

David L. Smith gives further explanation on the development and origin of church structure: “Any effort to construct the current forms of governance from biblical evidence would be doomed to failure; for the New Testament church was highly charismatic in its administrative structure and very primitive organizationally. What administrative structure there was seems to have been modeled on existing societal structures.” David L. Smith, *All God’s People: A Theology of the Church* (Wheaton: BridgePoint, 1996), 373. See also, Everett Ferguson, *The Church of Christ: A Biblical Ecclesiology for Today* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), 346-47.

³⁵See Edmund P. Clowney, *The Church* (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity, 1995), 111. For further discussion of the emergence of new church models, see Veli-Matti Karkkainen, *An Introduction to Ecclesiology: Ecumenical, Historical & Global Perspectives* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2002) 7-14; and Mark Dever, *Nine Marks of a Healthy Church* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2004), 26-33.

context in accomplishing the same redemption purposes.³⁶

Francis Schaeffer reasons similarly:

Anything the New Testament does not command concerning church form is a freedom to be exercised under the leadership of the Holy Spirit for that particular time and place. In other words, the New Testament sets boundary conditions, but within these boundary conditions there is much freedom to meet the changes that arise both in different places and at different times.³⁷

Thus, the New Testament “produces” the guidelines and boundaries for church models, and it is the church body that uses “biblical foundations, historical developments, and contextual realities” to construct (or produce) scripturally appropriate church models.³⁸ A more suitable question for Towns to ask would have been, “Does the EPGC [multi-site church] model fit within the framework and boundaries of Scripture?”

In spite of its problems, the question proves helpful as Towns uses it to highlight the importance of evaluating the multi-site church model for biblical fidelity. If indeed the multi-site church model does not fit within the ecclesiological framework established in the New Testament, the question must be asked, “Should the church even

³⁶Craig Van Gelder, *The Essence of the Church: A Community Created by the Spirit* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2000), 163.

³⁷Francis A. Schaeffer, “The Church at the End of the Twentieth Century,” in *The Complete Works of Francis A. Schaeffer: Christian Worldview*, vol. 4, *A Christian View of the Church* (Wheaton: Crossway, 1982), 4:60.

³⁸Van Gelder continues by highlighting important balances in formulating church structure. He elaborates, “Some tend to absolutize biblical forms as if God ordained a specific organizational pattern for the church to follow, and so they seek to replicate the biblical pattern for the church’s structure, processes, and leadership. Some tend to make certain historical forms into a normative polity for the church in all times and all places. These approaches are common in churches stemming from the Protestant Reformation where ecclesiology and polity focus on identifying and maintaining the true, institutional church. Some tend to make the church fit new cultural contexts with little regard for biblical principles and historical developments. They use a pragmatic decision-making approach on the premise that what works is of the Spirit and must, therefore, be biblical. All three approaches plague the church today. All three remind us how important it is for the church to be flexible and adaptive with new contexts and changing circumstances, which is what we find in the New Testament.” Van Gelder, *The Essence of the Church*, 159. See Robert L. Saucy, *The Church in God’s Program* (Chicago: Moody, 1972), 98, 105, 118; and Millard J. Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1998), 1094-97.

consider embracing a multi-site church framework?” If any multi-site church model does not fit, then it must be modified to acquiesce or the model must be jettisoned altogether.

Towns, Stetzer, and Bird demonstrate an understanding of this issue.³⁹ In their book *11 Innovations in the Local Church*, the authors affirm the multi-site church concept but offer significant questions about the employment of multi-site methods.⁴⁰ As they conclude their discussion on multi-site churches, they offer six areas or points of “What We Need to Consider” about the multi-site church phenomenon. Their concerns are summarized in six questions:⁴¹

(1) While “the multi-site church is working” presently, will it become decreasingly ineffective “as our culture becomes increasingly post-Christian”?

(2) Someone has to answer the question, “When will it stop?” More specifically, how far can multi-site churches go in reaching across cultural differences?

(3) Because “assumptions about church in Scripture cannot be found in the multi-site church,” what will happen to scriptural directives about matters such as pastoral acts, e.g., pastors praying over the sick (Jas 5:14), watching over believers placed in the pastor’s care (1 Peter 5:2), and breaking bread and praying together (Acts 2:42)?

(4) Because multi-site churches generally require a speaking ability that most leaders do not have, what will become of those called to the preaching ministry who do not possess strong preaching and communication skills? Further, what will happen to multi-site churches when their current compelling communicator falls morally, dies, or leaves the church?

(5) One reason that multi-sites are growing is that they offer better or “more quality” services and amenities than existing churches within their community. At what point should churches stop appealing to the consumer mentality of Christians

³⁹It is worth noting here that apparently Towns has resolved his own question in joining with Ed Stetzer and Warren Bird in writing *11 Innovations*. The book clearly has moved beyond questioning whether multi-site is a product of the New Testament to solving the challenges that the model presents.

⁴⁰Towns, Stetzer, and Bird, *11 Innovations*, 92.

⁴¹*Ibid.*, 92-94. For explanative purposes, I have taken liberty in summarizing each question by incorporating a mixture of paraphrases and direct quotes from the source material.

and non-Christians?

(6) While some churches hold to a theology that allows for multi-site leadership structures (bishop or overseer roles), what happens in those churches that hold to a “local church autonomy” in which a senior pastor oversees a series of churches or campuses?

The preceding questions show an important reality about the multi-site church phenomenon: While the multi-site approach may fit within the New Testament ecclesiological framework, several critical biblical/theological questions remain as to the biblical fidelity of the multi-site church model.⁴²

If indeed “multi-site” could have as profound an effect on the North American church as some suggest, if 30,000 American churches could “be multi-site within the next few years” as Surratt, Ligon, and Bird predict,⁴³ there exists a clear need to investigate the multi-site campus phenomenon and the ramifications of its application. A scriptural analysis is needed to address concerns like those raised by Towns, Stetzer, and Bird about the pastoral role of leadership and preaching in multi-site churches. Additional biblical exploration should also be conducted on congregational structure, care of believers, and the role of space and location as they relate to the church wellbeing.

Historical evaluation of multi-site ministries is necessary also to assess the strengths and weaknesses of multi-site practices. Evidence seems to suggest, for example, that multi-parish churches have had limited success over the last century.⁴⁴ Will multi-site churches meet the same fate? Though multi-site churches seem to be

⁴²See also Rodney Harrison, Tom Cheyney, and Don Overstreet, *Spin-Off Churches: How One Church Successfully Plants Another* (Nashville: B&H Publishing, 2008), 79-80.

⁴³Surratt, Ligon, and Bird, *Multi-Site Church Revolution*, 11.

⁴⁴See Lyle E. Schaller, *The Small Church Is Different!* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1982), 96-103; and Marvin T. Judy, *The Multiple Staff Ministry* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1969), 209-19.

growing, what types of growth are they experiencing? Another necessary component in defining the multi-site concept is an investigation and definition of the styles and approaches used by churches that have transitioned from single to multiple sites. Though some multi-site classifications are available, none seek to offer a comprehensive catalog or taxonomy of multi-site models. A systematic aggregation of multi-site approaches or classifications juxtaposed with early multi-site forms would likely yield a valuable benchmark for both current and future exploration of the topic.

With the accelerating growth, development, and advocacy of the multi-site church phenomenon in recent years, the need for further examination of the multi-site church concept becomes increasingly urgent. Presently, in light of both the potential benefits and dangers inherent in the wide scale acceptance and application of the multi-site church concept in North America, sufficient warrant exists for the execution of a doctoral dissertation on the multi-site church phenomenon.

The purposes of this work are twofold. The first is to provide an evaluation and critique of the multi-site church phenomenon that will serve as both an introduction to the multi-site church phenomenon and a foundation for further investigation into the subject. Based on preliminary research, I argue in this dissertation that the multi-site church concept is a biblically acceptable church structure, but one that must be bounded at points in order to ensure its appropriate application and continued benefit to the church in North America. Thus, the second purpose of this research project is to set forth a set of key parameters through which the multi-site church can be both biblically faithful and practically functional within the North American evangelical church context.

Background of the Proposal

My decision to study the multi-site church phenomenon developed largely as four streams of personal interest amalgamated. The first stream is my growing concern for the North American church. Numerous studies reveal that the evangelical church in the United States and Canada is in decline.⁴⁵ In considering what this fact means for my children and their children, for my extended family, our friends, and unbelievers across the nation, I sense a growing urgency to search for methods and means by which the spiritual direction of our nation can be moved into a positive direction. I want to see the church grow strong in North America and globally. Clearly, God initiates spiritual awakening and revival.⁴⁶ At the same time, God generally brings about significant spiritual change when believers seek Him and diligently prepare for His moving.⁴⁷

⁴⁵For example, (1) Win Arn avers, “Between 80% and 85% of all churches in North America are either plateaued or are declining.” Win Arn, *The Pastor’s Manual for Effective Ministry* (Monrovia, CA: Church Growth, 1988), 16. (2) Thomas Clegg and Warren Bird report that between 1900 and 1996 the number of churches in the United States dropped from 27 churches for every 10,000 people to 11 for every 10,000. Tom Clegg and Warren Bird, *Lost in America: How You and Your Church Can Impact the World Next Door* (Loveland, CO: Group, 2001), 30. (3) Ed Stetzer explains, “Although the number of churches [in the United States] has increased by just over 50 percent during the past century, the U.S. population has increased by 300 percent!” Ed Stetzer, *Planting New Churches in a Postmodern Age* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2003), 7. (4) George Barna notes, “The average number of adults attending services at a Protestant church during a typical week in 2001 was 90, the same as measured in 2000. This reflects a 10% decline from the 1997 level of 100 adults and a 12% drop from the average attendance in 1992. George Barna, *The State of the Church: 2002* (Ventura, CA: Issachar, 2002) 112. (5) Thom Rainer concludes, “Of the entire bridger generation [those born from 1977 to 1994], less than 30 percent attend church. America is clearly becoming less Christian, less evangelized, and less churched. Yet too many of those in our churches seem oblivious to this reality.” Thom Rainer, *Surprising Insights from the Unchurched and Proven Ways to Reach Them* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2001), 33-34.

⁴⁶See Jonathan Edwards, “A Narrative of Surprising Conversions,” in *Jonathan Edwards on Revival* (1736; reprint, Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth Trust, 1999), 7-22; and Charles Finney, “What Is Revival?” in *Lectures on Revival*, ed. Kevin Walter Johnson (Minneapolis: Bethany House, 1988), 11-19.

⁴⁷Bill Bright offers helpful explanation: “Revival is a sovereign work of God—in answer to sincere prevailing prayer—in which he (1) grips His people with deep conviction, repentance, forgiveness, and deliverance, from personal sins; (2) fills His people with the Holy Spirit and manifests in them the fruit and graces of the Holy Spirit; (3) fills the Church and community with His presence and power; (4) Causes non-Christians to earnestly seek Him; and (5) Ignites in His people, young and old, a passion to bring the lost to Christ at home and around the world.

In my study of the multi-site church idea, I sense that churches and their leaders have found an organizational tool that can foster positive shifts within an era of Christian decline. The multi-site church concept holds the potential to help churches more effectively reach their communities with the gospel and to become more focused on the multiplication of churches. This potential, however, must be channeled with wisdom and care. In this dissertation, I hope to offer insights that will help direct the multi-site church movement, its leaders, and the believers they influence toward a biblically faithful and fruitful utilization of the emerging multi-site paradigm.

The second stream of interest originates in my study of Donald McGavran and his concepts of evangelism and church growth. As McGavran served as the secretary and treasurer of the United Christian Missionary Society in India during the 1930s, it became clear to him that much of what Christian enterprises were doing resulted in *no* kingdom growth. The situation then is not so different from where many North American churches are today. McGavran wanted to see “church growth” not for numbers sake, but for spiritual growth and church reproduction in accordance with God’s Word:

By “church growth” we mean a process of spiritual reproduction whereby new congregations are formed. The Church in the New Testament times grew in this fashion. New congregations by the score sprang up where there had been none before. In our use of the term, a Church “grows” when it multiplies its membership and its congregations and then with ever-increasing power takes into itself converts in a widening stream.⁴⁸

The great and holy, righteous, and loving Creator God is sovereign. He rules the affairs of men and nations. Everything in creation is under His control. He has chosen, however, to give to His children the privilege of working together with Him to take the ‘Good News’ of His love and forgiveness in Christ to the world. In like manner, He has entrusted to man a vitally important role in preparing the way for revival. Whatever God tells you to do, He will give you the power and ability to do. The apostle Paul said, ‘It is God who works in you to will and to act according to his good purpose’ (Philippians 2:13).” Bill Bright, *The Coming Revival: America’s Call to Fast, Pray, and “Seek God’s Face”* (Orlando: NewLife, 1995), 15-16.

⁴⁸J. Waskom Pickett, et al., *Church Growth and Group Conversion*, 5th ed. (South Pasadena, CA: William Carey Library, 1973), 98.

I share McGavran's desire to see great growth as found within the New Testament. Further, in the line of Pickett, McGavran, and C. Peter Wagner, I embrace a "consecrated pragmatism," through which I constantly evaluate what churches are doing effectively and what can be done to make them more effective.⁴⁹ As an evangelism and church growth student trained in McGavran's teachings, I believe that the multi-site concept is not only one that should be studied, but one that should be researched heavily for the purpose of more effective evangelism.

The third interest stream leading me toward the multi-site concept developed in the spring of 2006. While I was taking part in a church consultation in Illinois, the leadership of the church began asking questions about the possibility of using the multi-site church model to help them handle growth barriers they were facing. The church had grown beyond their current worship capacity, and they were doing almost everything they could at their present location to accommodate the congregation's growth. After considering the various options before them (including relocating the church or building a new facility), they felt strongly that the multi-site option was the direction they needed to pursue. As the church leadership discussed the idea further, they explained that the multi-site church approach was, in their estimation, the best available for helping them reach more people with the gospel message.

⁴⁹*Consecrated pragmatism* is a name coined by C. Peter Wagner to expound upon Donald McGavran's *fierce pragmatism*, or the "[devising of] mission methods and policies in light of what God has blessed—and what he has obviously not blessed." Wagner describes it as "pragmatism that is used in obedience to God and for the ultimate purpose of glorifying God." C. Peter Wagner, *Church Growth and the Whole Gospel: A Biblical Mandate* (San Francisco: Harper and Row: 1981), 71-72. In short, consecrated pragmatism is discovering and applying God-revealed ideas, actions, or what Wagner labels "means" (hence the use of "pragmatism") that best accomplish the goal (or "ends") of fulfilling the Great Commission. See C. Peter Wagner, *Leading Your Church to Growth* (Ventura, CA: Regal, 1984), 201, and C. Peter Wagner, *Strategies for Church Growth* (Ventura, CA: Regal, 1987), 29-32, for more discussion.

As I traveled home from the consult, I began a cursory evaluation of the multi-site church model, and the more I considered it, the more intrigued I became with the topic. Investigation into multi-site churches in the following weeks converted my interest into excitement. I knew at that point that I wanted to do my dissertation work on the multi-site church phenomenon.

The fourth stream of personal interest has been somewhat latent. As a bachelor's level student, I earned a BA in geography. I chose this field of study because of my interest in demographics and the study of human interaction as it relates to space and location. During my preliminary inquiries into the multi-site church concept, I found many similarities between my bachelor's work and key facets of the multi-site church topic. Both include subject matter dealing directly with geographic elements of location, space allocation, distribution of goods and resources, human interaction over time and space, distribution, and transportation. In considering the multi-site topic, I have found the opportunity to return to a previous academic passion and to use that passion to benefit and strengthen the church.

As I consider these four streams, and as I continue to explore the multi-site church concept, my excitement about the subject matter intensifies. I believe that I have selected a dissertation topic for which I possess the academic and professional background to treat capably, as well as the personal interest to sustain from initiation to completion of the project.

Author Bias

While my desire is to approach this dissertation with as much objectivity as possible, even in my introduction, I write from a specific perspective and certain biases

are evident. One of the most important works I read during my doctoral coursework was Lyle Dorsett's book, *A Passion for Souls: The Life of D. L. Moody*.⁵⁰ While the work is excellent in many regards, the most significant aspect of Dorsett's book was his candid presentation of his biases at the book's beginning. In following Dorsett's example, let me set forth several of my partialities and predispositions at this point.

First, the reader should know that I esteem ecclesiology as one of the most flexible doctrines in Scripture.⁵¹ This position stems from recognizing great divergence in the opinions and practices of church polity and organization throughout the Church and denominations. Second, I value, respect, and advocate evangelism, church growth, and church planting as presented in the theories and principles of Donald McGavran and the Church Growth or Effective Evangelism movement. Third, I understand the Great Commission to be of critical importance, and while it may be championed regularly within North American churches, it is not as often embraced in practice.

Fourth, I am open to the multi-site church concept. I see value in the concept strategically and practically, and I perceive that multi-site approaches offer churches the potential to reach, assimilate, disciple, spiritually reproduce, and develop a greater number of people, though, as noted throughout this prospectus, a biblical analysis of the multi-site concept is still in order. Fifth, I remain staunch in my commitments to the inerrancy, infallibility, and sufficiency of the Scripture, and I approach this dissertation as a conservative evangelical. While making this point, however, I adhere to a principle

⁵⁰Lyle W. Dorsett, *A Passion for Souls: The Life of D. L. Moody* (Chicago: Moody, 1997), 24-26.

⁵¹See Alan Hirsh, *The Forgotten Ways: Reactivating the Missional Church* (Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2006), 142-45.

often asserted by Timothy K. Beougher during my doctoral coursework: we will all have aspects of our theology corrected when we meet the Father. Thus, when approaching concepts that may be somewhat novel or unfamiliar, I assume a position consistent with that of Gamaliel. While the question of multi-site acceptability is vastly different than the truth of Christianity, Gamaliel's basic concept still applies: "if this plan or action is of men, it will be overthrown; but if it is of God, you will not be able to overthrow [it]; or else you may even be found fighting against God" (Acts 5:38b-39). In short, if the application of multi-site strategies yields greater numbers of genuine fruit-bearing disciples (John 15:5-7), it would be unwise to reject the multi-site church concept.

Clearly, other biases do exist, but the above points are the primary considerations needing acknowledgement. It is my hope that with these factors addressed the reader will have a better framework for understanding my lines of argument, use of source material, and dissertation findings. With biases presented, we now turn toward the research questions.

Research Questions

The majority of existing materials treating the multi-site phenomenon have dealt vaguely with some of the deeper questions involved with the utilization of the multi-site concept. One of primary goals of this project is to provide a starting point or baseline for analyzing the multi-site movement. With this goal in mind, I have encountered several questions that need to be addressed in constructing such a foundational analysis:

1. Does the multi-site church model fit within the framework of Scripture? What are key biblical/theological tension points of the multi-site church approach? What parameters should be established to ensure biblical fidelity of multi-site churches?
2. How did the multi-site church concept originate, and what church or churches can

be considered the originators of the multi-site approach?

3. Is the multi-site approach the appropriate next step for megachurches that have grown beyond the limitations of their current site, situation, and leadership structure?⁵²
4. What are the primary benefits of a church's moving to a multi-site structure? What are the negatives or disadvantages of choosing to use a multi-site ministry model?
5. Is the multi-site church approach to ministry primarily a market-driven phenomenon? If it is a market-driven phenomenon, should the concept be rejected?
6. What are the known forms of multi-site churches? What are the similarities and differences between the models or types? What factors should be used to delineate between multi-site approaches?
7. How should the delivery of sermons be understood within the framework of multi-site churches? Is it acceptable or beneficial to use prerecorded messages in worship services in place of "live" or "in person" preachers?
8. At what point does the distance between the various sites of a multi-site church become too much? Is there an appropriate minimum and maximum distance between campuses?

Research Methodology

Two processes or research methods have been utilized in conducting research within this dissertation, and explanation of both processes follows. The first process was an examination of literature dealing with or related to the multi-site concept. The second was as a series of qualitative interviews with multi-site church advocates, critics, observers, and participants.⁵³

⁵²This question is stimulated in part by Erwin McManus' foreword to *The Multi-Site Church Revolution*. McManus comments, "The multi-site movement is a strategic response to the question of how to maintain momentum and growth while not being limited to the monolithic structure of a megachurch." Surratt, Ligon, and Bird, *Multi-Site Church Revolution*, 7.

⁵³See Herbert J. Rubin and Irene S. Rubin, *Qualitative Interviewing: The Art of Hearing Data*, 2nd ed. (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2005); and Anselm Strauss and Juliet Corbin, *Basics of Qualitative Research: Techniques and Procedures for Developing Grounded Theory*, 2nd ed. (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 1998).

Literature Review

In the literature review, I began first by researching materials directly related to multi-site churches. Throughout the research process, I have collected all books available that incorporate multi-site titles, and those directly related to multi-site, multi-venue, satellite, and key location churches, their strategies, and their structures. I also researched the authors of these publications and explored their writings as they relate to the dissertation topic. Additionally, I explored web materials and articles, periodicals, academic journals, theses, and dissertation catalogues for materials related to multi-site churches. These findings have been integrated into the bibliography, analyzed briefly, and assessed for usability and applicability in the dissertation.

Because the understanding of ecclesiology is critical to a proper evaluation of the multi-site church topic, I consulted with ecclesiological authorities (both in theory and in practice) such as Gregg Allison and Chuck Lawless to find the most formative and comprehensive works in the field. Incorporating their suggestions with resources studied during my masters and doctoral level coursework, I accrued resources to guide me through the biblical, theological, and ecclesiological research of this dissertation. Additionally, I collected numerous commentaries dealing with biblical texts seminal to understanding the purposes and functions of churches.

In collaboration with Timothy K. Beougher and Greg Wills, I obtained several volumes on church history. These works are specifically related to the development, expression, and expansion of churches in North America. Each work included provides insight into the influences contributing to the emergence of multi-site practice.

Interviewing Authorities on the Church

In advance of this dissertation, I began conducting informal interviews about the multi-site concept with authorities in a variety of church leadership fields. These interviews included, Thom Rainer, president of LifeWay Christian Resources; Chuck Lawless, dean of the Billy Graham School of Missions, Evangelism and Church Growth at The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary; Lyle Schaller, parish consultant and author; Dave Ferguson, senior pastor of Community Christian Church, Naperville, IL; and Ed Stetzer, president of LifeWay Research and LifeWay's missiologist in residence.

During the process of formal interviewing, I engaged other individuals for further qualitative interviewing. I selected this group for interviews based on their familiarity with the multi-site church phenomenon as either multi-site researchers or multi-site practitioners. Those I interviewed are as follows:

1. Gregg R. Allison, professor of theology, The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, Louisville, Kentucky
2. Warren Bird, research director, The Leadership Network, Dallas, Texas
3. Dave Browning, senior pastor, Christ the King Community Church, International, Burlington, Washington
4. Tom Cheyney, strategic resourcing unit manager, Strategic Church Planting Readiness Team, North American Mission Board, Southern Baptist Convention, Alpharetta, Georgia
5. Bill Easum, co-founder and senior consultant, Easum, Bandy & Associates, Port Arthur, Texas
6. Kevin Ezell, president, North American Mission Board, Alpharetta, Georgia
7. Carl F. George, church consultant, Metachurch, Taylors, South Carolina
8. Edmund "Eddie" Gibbs, Donald A. McGavran professor of church growth, Fuller Theological Seminary, Pasadena, California

9. John Hammett, professor of systematic theology, Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary, Wake Forest, North Carolina
10. Rodney Harrison, assistant professor of church planting and Nehemiah Center director, Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, Kansas City, Missouri
11. Jonathan Leeman, editorial director, 9 Marks, Washington, DC
12. Greg Ligon, director of publishing and director of the Multi-Site Leadership Community, The Leadership Network, Dallas, Texas
13. Larry Osborne, senior pastor, North Coast Church, Vista, California
14. Peter Roebbelen, pastor, The Sanctuary, Toronto, Canada
15. Elmer Towns, vice president, Liberty University, dean, School of Religion, Liberty University, Lynchburg, Virginia
16. Dave Travis, senior vice president for development, The Leadership Network, Dallas, Texas
17. Thomas White, vice president for student services and communication and associate professor of systematic theology, Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, Fort Worth, Texas
18. John M. Yeats, assistant professor of church history, Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, Fort Worth, Texas

Within these interviews, I used the following interview questions:

1. How and when did you first learn about the multi-site church concept?
2. Whom do you consider primary innovators in the development of multi-site churches?
3. To your knowledge, what was the first multi-site church in North America?
4. In your estimation, what factors contributed to the development of multi-site churches?
5. With what types of multi-site church models are you familiar?
6. Do you see biblical limitations to using the multi-site approach? If so, what are they?
7. Do you see biblical or theological tension points for the multi-site approach? If so,

what are they?

8. What (if any) biblical or theological validation do you find for advocating multi-site churches?
9. Should there be boundaries placed on the geographic extent of multi-site churches?
10. What (if any) dangers do you see in churches using video or holographic preaching?
11. What are the benefits of using the multi-site approach?
12. What is the relationship between multi-site churches and church planting?
13. Are multi-site churches the next step for megachurches? How do you understand the relationship between the two?
14. Are multi-site churches simply smaller denominations? Why or why not?
15. Where do you see the multi-site church concept going within the next thirty years?

Research Limitations and Delimitations

In order to delimit the focus of this study, several research parameters were established. The first parameter was that of dating the study. As noted earlier, differing opinions exist as to the beginning of the multi-site church concept. For the purposes of this study, the emphasis of exploration was delimited to primarily between 1950 to the present, with greater consideration given to the years 1990 until 2009.

Two findings offered by Lyle Schaller validate 1950 as the best starting point for multi-site church investigation. First, Schaller documents the earliest use of the multi-site concept that corroborates the Surratt, Ligon, Bird multi-site church definition:

What probably will turn out to be the most widely followed use of the concept, however, began to appear in rural America in the 1950s. The typical arrangement calls for an administrative merger of one or two of three small open-country churches with a large congregation in town.⁵⁴

⁵⁴Schaller, *Innovations in Ministry*, 121.

Second, Schaller shows that the emergence of multi-site practices within the businesses sector coincides with the appearance of the multi-site church concept: “The concept of multiple sites for department stores, financial institutions, universities, public libraries, theological schools, medical clinics, law firms, and hospitals surfaced during the 1950s but did not become popular until the 1960s.”⁵⁵ Surratt, Ligon, and Bird, arrive at a similar conclusion, connecting multi-site development in the marketplace to the 1950s.⁵⁶

Greater consideration was given to the years 1990 to 2009, because beginning with 1990 and increasingly with each passing year, both multi-site churches and multi-site research have together appeared with greater frequency. Thus, historical analysis of the multi-site church concept before 1990, and especially before 1950, was done in a limited, generalized fashion.

The second parameter is that of geographic location. Currently, multi-site churches have reached beyond the boundaries of North America to locations around the world, thus making the multi-site phenomenon an issue of global proportions.⁵⁷ Nevertheless, the literature reveals that the majority of multi-site churches exist within the United States. In light of this fact, the focus of this study was delimited to multi-site churches in North America, including the United States and Canada.

The third parameter is scope of treatment. One could take the various sections

⁵⁵Schaller, *Discontinuity and Hope*, 7.

⁵⁶Surratt, Ligon, and Bird, *Multi-Site Revolution*, 9-10.

⁵⁷*Ibid.*, 202-03. The authors cite, as the primary international multi-site church example, David Yonggi Cho’s Yoido Full Gospel Church in South Korea. The researchers also report that churches using the multi-site approach exist in Ghana, South Africa, Brazil, Chile, Argentina, Ecuador, Nigeria, and

of this proposed dissertation and compose full dissertations on each of the sections. Presently, however, what is most needed in investigating the multi-site phenomenon is a more generalized introduction to the topic, that is, a foundation or beginning point from which the movement can be examined comprehensively. Thus, this study's scope is naturally somewhat broad, but it needed to be fashioned as such in order to provide an entry point for study in the field and further inquiry into the multi-site topic.

Other limitations inherent with this topic are what one might expect with a novel approach to doing church. First, there is a limited amount of literature treating the topic specifically. Other than the *Multi-Site Church Revolution*, "An Ecclesiology for Multi-site Churches: Thinking Biblically about the Local Church in Multiple Locations," *Multi-Site Churches: Guidance for the Movement's Next Generation*, "A Multi-Plantation Ministry: Blending a Multi-site and Church Planting Strategy in the Local Church," and *A Multisite Road Trip: Exploring the New Normal*, there have been no other substantive works to date dedicated *specifically* to dealing with multi-site churches.⁵⁸ More than twenty books deal with multi-site briefly, treating the subject with mere paragraphs in most cases, a few pages generally, and with a chapter in some instances. The production of similar materials seems to be increasing, however. Currently, the Leadership Network offers more than twenty articles dealing with the multi-site phenomenon, but these offerings (as well as most on the topic) are both popular in tone and more concerned with

"elsewhere." Only Cho's church in South Korea and Redeemer Christian Church of God in Nigeria are documented in their discussion.

⁵⁸Surratt, Ligon, and Bird, *Multi-Site Church Revolution*; Reavely, "An Ecclesiology for Multi-site Churches"; McConnell, *Multi-Site Churches*; Floyd, "A Multi-Plantation Ministry"; and Geoff Surratt, Greg Ligon, and Warren Bird, *A Multi-Site Church Road Trip: Exploring the New Normal* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2009).

developing new ideas than analyzing and critiquing the multi-site concept.⁵⁹ Further, while some classification systems have been offered, no one has yet to provide a comprehensive and detailed classification of the various methods of and approaches to multi-site.⁶⁰

Additional limitations were encountered while progressing through the research project. These matters were acknowledged as applicable and dealt with as necessary. With the parameters, delimitations, limitations, and research methodology of the dissertation established, it is now fitting to begin a historical exploration of the multi-site church phenomenon.

⁵⁹See pp. 9-10 n. 23 above for a detailed listing of these materials.

⁶⁰Refer to p. 3 n. 7 above for some existing multi-site church classification models. The most comprehensive classification system to date [2008] is offered by Harrison, Cheyney, and Overstreet in the book *Spin-Off Churches*. In their categorization of multi-site models, entitled “Major Approaches to the Multisite Church,” the authors offer the following approaches: (1) “The franchisee approach” (“cloned” or “branded” model where most aspects of originating church are copied), (2) “the licensee approach” (similar to franchised model, but less copying of elements found in originating church service(s)), (3) “the new venture model” (ultimately focused on launching a church plant), (4) “the encore model” (in which an encore presentation of a church service is held at a different location), (5) “the satellite model” (“in which satellite congregations meet in various locations, including apartment buildings, homes, and office buildings”), (6) “the déjà vu model” (“similar to the franchisee approach, seeks to incorporate the elements of the original service to provide worshippers a familiar feeling and presence to the main campus worship”), (7) “the third place model” (in which services are held “where people want to be, such as theatres, sports cafés, coffee houses, community hang-outs, other “third places”), (8) “the video venue model” (in which video is used to expand or reproduce worship in another location), (9) “the resurrection model” (in which a healthier church starts a multisite service in a dead or declining church), and (10) “the multicultural model” (“These models will use the same sermon and program that have been translated into the language and culture of the community”).

While Harrison, Cheyney, and Overstreet offer a more detailed explanation of multi-site categories than their preceding counterparts, the information they render remains limited. Their chapter on multi-site churches is six pages in length, they devote only two pages to their classification, and they give only one paragraph of discussion to each model. Harrison et al., *Spin-Off Churches*, 75-80.

HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENTS IN THE MULTI-SITE CHURCH PHENOMENON

Introduction

From where did the multi-site church concept come? Is it a recent development in church history, or did multi-site churches begin in the book of Acts as some purport?¹ It is difficult to pinpoint one specific event, time, place, or person as the key initiator of the multi-site church concept. The multi-site idea, though simple in many respects, developed via a more complex evolutionary process. The multi-site church model emerged progressively through the convergence of ideas, beliefs, social constructs, and technological advancements. These developments are the focus of the next three chapters on the historical development of the multi-site church phenomenon.

In the pages to follow, the convergence of multi-site developments will be introduced in a limited and generalized fashion. In the process, these developments will

¹Geoff Surratt, Greg Ligon, and Warren Bird, *The Multi-Site Church Revolution: Being One Church . . . In Many Locations* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2006), 17, 91, 198-200. Surratt, Ligon, and Bird cite both Elmer Towns and Aubrey Malphurs for validation. Towns' findings do justify their point: "The book of Acts seemingly provides a biblical base for the extended geographical parish [multi-site] church. The church at Jerusalem was one church (Acts 8:1), yet it was made up of several parts, or units. The Jerusalem church is described as a unit: 'the multitude of those who believed were of one heart and soul' (Acts 4:32, *NKJV*). Note that the word 'multitude' was singular; the church was one entity." Elmer Towns, *10 of Today's Most Innovative Churches* (Ventura, CA: Regal, 1990), 242-43.

A reading of the Malphurs' text, however, shows the authors' claim to be somewhat dubious. Surratt, Ligon, and Bird, state, "Aubrey Malphurs observes that Corinth and other first century churches were multi-site, as a number of multi-house churches were considered to be a part of one citywide church." Surratt, Ligon, and Bird, *The Multi-Site Church Revolution*, 17. While Malphurs does say that "the early church existed at two levels [house church and city church]," Aubrey Malphurs, *Being Leaders: The Nature or Authentic Christian Leadership* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2003), 23-24, he gives no indication that he is referring to multi-site churches. In fact, Malphurs specifically clarifies the purpose for his comments: "My point in bring up the two levels of churches is to deal with the question of a plurality of elders." *Ibid.*, 25.

be pieced together as they fit into the broader framework of the multi-site church movement in North America.²

This chapter will begin with a survey of multi-site-type constructs that serve as forerunners of the emerging multi-site movement. Chapters 3 and 4 then will further explain the historical development of the multi-site church phenomenon by addressing catalytic factors leading to the genesis of multi-site churches and the dawn of multisite church movement respectively.

In the section, the discussion will focus on multi-site ministries and historic examples of multi-site church archetypes. Though these churches and church constructs should not be considered multi-site churches, they do serve as an appropriate entry point into the North American multi-site church discussion. Methodist circuit riding, the mission Sunday school concept, influential churches like First Presbyterian Church of Seattle, Washington, and the Key Church Strategy will be given consideration.

Historic Examples of Multi-Site Church Features in North America

Because multi-site churches as defined in chapter 1 surfaced only after contemporary social and technological advancements, the existence of multi-site churches before the later half of the twentieth century is unsubstantiated.³ At the same

²Admittedly, not all aspects of multi-site church development will be examined in order to maintain focus on the *key* factors instrumental in initiating the multi-site church movement.

³In *The Multi-Site Church Revolution*, Surratt, Ligon, and Bird assert that the multi-site church concept likely began with the early church and that over time the movement developed or evolved into a new concept of doing church today. In their words, “In some ways, the multi-site approach is not new. Some argue that the church of the New Testament era was multi-site in many cities. A case can be made that as church history unfolded, the church had many multi-site expressions, from mission stations to Methodist circuit riders to branch Sunday schools done by bus ministry. Digital technologies, combined

time, early examples of church constructs demonstrating multi-site features deserve consideration. An understanding of these multi-site arrangements and their contributions to multi-site church development is critical to recognizing the evolution of the multi-site church concept, and thus, today's multi-site churches. In the pages to follow, seven examples will be examined and appraised.

Methodist Circuit Riders

Key to the development of current multi-site churches in North America are the early attempts of churches and church leaders to conduct church ministry over an extended area or multiple locations. One of the primary historic examples of ministry extension in North America is the work of the Methodist circuit riders.

The concept of the Methodist circuit-riding preacher first began under John Wesley's leadership in Bristol, England.⁴ As John Mark Terry explains,

Wesley began preaching outdoors at Bristol in 1739. Thereafter, he traveled widely throughout England, Ireland, and Scotland. He preached whenever and wherever he could, often from horseback. He traveled five thousand miles a year and preached fifteen sermons each week. Normally, he asked permission to preach from the local Anglican priest. When refused permission, Wesley preached anyway.⁵

Wesley introduced the circuit preacher innovation in an attempt to supply lay preachers for his rising Methodist movement.⁶ As Wesley labored to cultivate an environment for spiritual awakening among his Englishmen and revival in the Church of

with growing social acceptance of branch church ideas, have made a new movement possible today.” Surratt, Ligon, and Bird, *Multi-Site Church Revolution*, 91.

⁴John Mark Terry, *Evangelism: A Concise History* (Nashville: B&H, 1994), 104.

⁵Ibid.

⁶Justo Gonzalez, *The Story of Christianity*, vol. 2, *The Reformation to the Present Day* (New York: Harper Collins, 1985), 217.

England, he began launching small group “societies” in which believers met together to focus on spiritual disciplines or “the methods.” These society gatherings grew in popularity and in size; thus Wesley, in order to care effectively for the needs of society members, organized his societies into smaller “classes” comprised of eleven individuals plus one society leader.⁷ As societies became increasingly numerous, Wesley chose to enlist lay preachers to satisfy the need for society preaching that he could no longer address personally.⁸ As John Vaughn elaborates,

Wesley organized his followers into territories called circuits. They established a systematic plan for regularly visiting his followers by communities and cities. The circuits were composed of usually large groups known as societies. There were general gatherings whose only membership requirement was ‘a desire to flee from the wrath to come, to be saved from [one’s] sins.’ The society in Bristol had 1,100 members.⁹

As the societies continued to grow, they began to exceed gathering space available in homes of society members; Terry explains that Wesley then introduced the “innovation” of “meeting houses, or as [Wesley] called them, chapels,” and through monies collected from society members, “Wesley encouraged the construction of . . . chapels.”¹⁰ Interestingly, because he remained faithful to the Church of England throughout his entire ministry, Wesley rigorously opposed the idea that his “methods” societies were an attempt to create a new denomination. At the same time, by creating

⁷Ibid., 213.

⁸It is worth noting that Wesley did not want lay preachers leading societies initially. However, after seeing layman Thomas Maxfield preach at a society in person, Wesley changed his mind. This move greatly enhanced the ability for societies to grow larger and to multiply. Ibid. See also, Terry, *Evangelism*, 105.

⁹John Vaughan, *The Large Church: A Twentieth-Century Expression of the First Century Church* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1985), 45-46.

¹⁰Terry, *Evangelism*, 104.

the auxiliary organization of societies, Wesley's labors expanded a clear chasm between his followers and the Church of England.

Across the Atlantic, Wesley's methods found a favorable milieu in the emerging colonies of the future United States. Wesley's followers, Thomas Coke and Francis Asbury, introduced Wesley's twin innovations of circuit riding and chapels with much success. Focusing on Asbury especially, Payne explains,

Shortly after Francis Asbury's arrival in America in 1771, he began to use the same circuit-riding methodology pioneered by Wesley in England. Riders were sent on preaching circuits, organizing new believers into classes and grouping classes in a particular geographical region.¹¹

While the cultural and political environments of England and the United States were starkly different, Methodist leaders, tooled with ideas of societies, circuits, and chapels, found an American colonial context primed for the Methodist church structure.

Justo Gonzalez expounds further:

The success of Methodism was partly due to the degree to which it responded to new needs resulting from the Industrial Revolution. During the latter half of the eighteenth century, England was undergoing a process of rapid industrialization. This created a mass movement of population to the industrial centers. Such people, uprooted by economic circumstances, tended to lose their connection with the church, whose parish structure was unable to respond to the needs of the new urban masses. It was among those masses that Methodism filled a need and found most of its members.

In North America, a completely different process—the westward movement of settlers—gave rise to an uprooted population lacking traditional ecclesiastic links, and whom the older churches seldom reached.¹²

Francis Asbury capitalized well on the American religious landscape. He personally demonstrated an unyielding commitment to pursuing the unreached population of North

¹¹J. D. Payne, *Discovering Church Planting: An Introduction to the Whats, Whys, and Hows of Global Church Planting* (Colorado Springs, CO: Paternoster, 2009), 266-67.

¹²Gonzalez, *The Reformation to the Present Day*, 215-16.

America, and with great rigor, he raised up a cadre of young Methodist circuit riding preachers to emulate him.¹³ While the lives of circuit riders were difficult and often quite short, their ministry proved invaluable for the proliferation of Methodism across the American frontier.¹⁴ Fredrick A. Northwood, author of *The Story of American Methodism*, elucidates,

Although there was no master plan for the westward expansion of Methodism, there seemed to be, because of the peculiar polity of the church. The effective combination of local preachers and traveling preachers was perfectly suited to the environment of the frontier. It was the combination of the two that worked wonders. The famous circuit rider would have been severely limited without the able service of the local preacher, who was his complement. If the traveling preacher provided the necessary mobility, the local preacher provided the perseverance for survival. Frequently, the circuit rider penetrated a scattered wilderness community only to discover that a local preacher—or exhorter—or class leader—had already begun to organize a society. Nevertheless, the adaptability of the traveling form of ministry made possible the systematic pursuit of the frontier following the westward movement of the people.¹⁵

In light of these findings presented on the concept of Methodist societies and circuit riders, it is not surprising that several attribute the origin of multi-site churches to Wesley's Methodism structure.¹⁶

¹³On Asbury, Terry notes, "He remained a bachelor in order to give more time to his successful ministry. He traveled continuously, touring Methodist circuits from Georgia to Maine as well as Ohio and Kentucky. During his tenure, he ordained three thousand circuit riders." Terry, *Evangelism*, 127. See also, M. Thomas Starkes, *God's Commissioned People* (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1984), 149.

¹⁴Chronicling the lives of circuit rides, Finke and Stark explain, "The life of a circuit rider was one of extreme hardship. Of the first 700 Methodist circuit riders, nearly half died before age thirty, 199 of them within their first five years of service." Roger Finke and Rodney Stark, *The Churching of America, 1776-2005: Winners and Losers in Our Religious Economy* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2006), 164.

¹⁵Frederick A. Norwood, *The Story of American Methodism* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1974), 146.

¹⁶For an example, see Dave Browning, *Deliberate Simplicity: How the Church Does More by Doing Less* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2009), 143-44. Bob Smietana, "High-Tech Circuit Riders: Satellite Churches are Discovering a New Way to Grow the Body of Christ," *Christianity Today*, 31 August 2005, 60. Though Smietana does not argue this point, his comparison between past and current circuit riders is valuable.

While aspects of John Wesley’s model do not fit within the definition of a multi-site church, his work does exhibit similarities to current multi-site church structure.¹⁷ Thus, Wesley’s innovations of circuit riding and chapels provide a helpful entry point to the multi-site church discussion. Wesley’s approach to overcoming location and geography, and his willingness to extend his personal ministry to more than one location have challenged some contemporary pastors to consider whether they can lead churches in a similar fashion.

The Mission Sunday School Model

The origination of “Sunday school” is generally credited to Robert Raikes, who, in July 1780, developed an educational program designed to remedy vice among the

When riders preached circuits that “included 20-30 preaching points [and their] worship services were generally held in whatever facilities were available—even outside” it may seem like these circuit churches utilized multi-site church model, but they did not. Ed Stetzer, “Baptists and Methodists on the Frontier” (n.d.), 16 [on-line]; accessed 2 June 2008; available from www.newchurches.com; Internet. See also, Terry, *Evangelism*, 128. The reason that historic Methodist circuit riding structure was not a multi-site church or “one church meeting in multiple locations” is because circuit churches were not a single church, but many churches. John Mark Terry’s description of the circuit rider structure is helpful in clarifying this point. He states, “All early Methodist preachers carried on an itinerant preaching ministry. They preached at more than one church, traveling along regular circuits, preaching in the Methodist societies and classes in the area. If there were no existing classes, the circuit rider attempted to establish them.” Terry, *Evangelism*, 128.

Two insights from Terry’s statement demonstrate why this type of church model is not a multi-site church. First, Terry explains that the preachers “preached at more than one church.” If the church were a multi-site church, the preacher would be preaching at another site of the church as he moved along his circuit instead of another church altogether. Because the congregations (or societies) all considered themselves to be independent churches disconnected from one another except by their relationship to the intenerate pastor, these churches could not be a multi-site church or “one church existing in two or more locations.” Second, as the preacher traveled into new areas, his goal was not to add additional sites to one church, but to add new or additional church societies or starts. Thus, the circuit preaching ministry was a church planting or starting mechanism rather than a single church extension mechanism.

¹⁷Some of the similarities between multi-site churches and the circuit riding preacher phenomenon include (1) the sharing of a single preacher across multiple congregational gatherings; (2) the connection of a series of congregational gatherings throughout a circuit; and (3) a heavy reliance upon lay leadership for conducting the discipleship and pastoral care functions at each congregational gathering across of a circuit or church structure.

working children of Gloucester, England.¹⁸ David Gough conveys how the concept developed:

The first school met on Sundays, the only day the children were not working, in the home of a Mrs. Meredith of Sooty Alley. Soon over one hundred boys between the ages of six and fourteen began attending. The only requirement for entry was a clean face and combed hair, but discipline was strictly enforced. Initially the Bible served as the only text, until four textbooks written by Raikes became a part of the curriculum. Lessons were taught in the mornings and early afternoons, after which the children were taken to church for instruction in the catechism. Within three years, eight such schools were opened in Gloucester. Decreasing crime among juveniles correlated with the establishment of the schools. Local factory owners who employed many of the young men, marveled at the transformed character of those who were attending.¹⁹

Two aspects of the Sunday school approach are worthy of note. First, the model focused on influencing children who were not being reached through existing church ministries. Second, Raikes' Sunday school program was not a church-wide educational structure designed to spur existing church members toward greater faithfulness. The original Sunday school mechanism was crafted to bring disconnected children to Christ in order to counteract their physical and spiritual poverty. Clearly, the tool worked effectively: "By 1830 . . . it was estimated that 1.25 million British children

¹⁸Individuals like H. F. Cope would not argue with this statement, but they would contend that Sunday school expressions have been evident from the time of the early church forward. Here is Cope's rationale: "It would be futile to attempt to prove that the early Christians had formal institutions under the care of the churches, which correspond to our Sunday-schools. The pedigree of the Sunday-school is to be traced in principles rather than in institutions [emphasis added]. It is seen in the practical expression of the principle of the religious instruction of the young." In his discussion, Cope carefully summarizes Sunday school-type movements led or initiated by individuals such as Gerard Groot (The Brethren of the Common Life), Martin Luther, Francis Xavier (1506-1552), Carlo Borromeo, Bellarmine of Capua (1542-1621), Count Zinzendorf, Ulrich Zwingli, August Hermann Francke (1663-1727), Hannah Ball, John Frederic Oberlin, and finally, Robert Raikes (1731-1811). H. F. Cope, *The Evolution of the Sunday School* (Norwood, MA: Plimpton Press, 1910), 1-58. For a concise historic overview of Sunday school development from the early church through 1888, see Clay Trumbull, *The Sunday-School: Its Origin, Mission, Methods, and Auxiliaries*, Yale Lectures on the Sunday School (Philadelphia: John D. Wattles, 1888), 1-144.

¹⁹David Gough, "Robert Raikes," in *Evangelical Dictionary of Christian Education*, ed. Michael J. Anthony (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2001), 578.

were being reached through the Sunday school.”²⁰

On November 3, 1783, with measurable success in place, Raikes used his family’s community paper, the *Gloucester Journal*, to introduce and endorse the value of the Sunday school concept to a larger audience. By first hand exposure or by reading the writings of Raikes, John Wesley learned of the Sunday school concept. He appraised it as “one of the noblest specimens of charity which have been set on foot in England.”²¹

Wesley’s sentiment was a foreshadowing of things to come. In time, Raikes’ Sunday school idea fused with Wesley’s societies concept would together find widespread application and success in the United States as the mission Sunday school.²²

This model can be explained as follows:

A Sunday school is usually an evangelistic outreach where children and adults are brought together to be taught the Word of God in a systematic manner. The Sunday school mission is usually staffed by Christians from a nearby church, and the expenses . . . are paid by the sponsoring church.²³

Variations of the mission Sunday school model consist of “mission outposts, annex

²⁰Ibid.

²¹Ibid.

²²Ken Garland argues that other religious immigrants besides Wesley brought Sunday school to the United States earlier, and that Wesley and his followers brought “another wave” later. While this may be true, no one proliferated the concept more capably than the Methodists did. Ken Garland, “Sunday School,” in *Evangelical Dictionary of Christian Education*, ed. Michael J. Anthony (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2001), 671. It would be an oversimplification to say that only two concepts were fully responsible for the outpost Sunday school approach. For example, Wesley’s societies took much from Philipp Jakob Spener’s Pietism, and specifically his *ecclesiolae* (little churches) concept. Similar forces undoubtedly played a minor role in developing the outpost approach. To acknowledge Raikes and Wesley’s concepts as primary components of the outpost synthesis, however, is fitting and appropriate. For further consideration, see Gwang Seok Oh, *John Wesley’s Ecclesiology: A Study in Its Sources and Development* (Lanham, MD: The Scarecrow Press, 2008), 96-100; and Gonzalez, *The Reformation to the Present Day*, 205-16.

²³Elmer L. Towns, *A Practical Encyclopedia of Evangelism and Church Growth* (Ventura, CA: Regal, 1995), 102.

Sunday schools, preaching halls” and satellite chapels.²⁴ This type of ministry framework is visible in several church ministries to be explored shortly, including First Baptist Church, Dallas; Seattle’s First Presbyterian Church; and most recently, Highland Park Baptist Church, Chattanooga, Tennessee. Common to all mission Sunday school ministries are three distinct characteristics as offered by Elmer Towns:

1. Depends on sponsoring church. Property owned by sponsoring church. Offerings go to central treasury.
2. Ministry is led by Christians from sponsoring church. Mission people help in ministry.
3. Decisions for ministry and organization made by sponsoring church.²⁵

Two key elements are evident within the mission Sunday school model, hereafter referred to as the “mission” model. First, missions rely heavily upon the sponsoring church for funding, direction, and human resources. Without financial and personnel support from a sponsoring church, mission schools, outposts, or preaching points would cease to exist. Thus, missions demonstrated an implicit dependency on the sponsor congregation. A mission is not a satellite congregation or church of the sponsoring church, nor is the mission a self-sufficient, autonomous church. Missions are extension “ministries,” rather than congregations, of sponsor churches.

Second, mission ministries are primarily focused on evangelizing and discipling specific population segments, rather than on starting new churches for or

²⁴Vaughan, *The Large Church*, 74. Vaughan acknowledges the variety of names for this model, explaining, “The names give to these groups are as diverse as the countries where they are located.” *Ibid.*, 31.

²⁵Towns, *Practical Encyclopedia of Evangelism*, 103.

within those populations.²⁶ Mission ministries employ leaders exported in from their sponsoring churches. Those leaders, in turn, view their investment in the mission as an auxiliary service of their church, rather than the mission being understood as a church. The idea of developing group members to become indigenous ministry leaders may be intended, but preparing and training those individuals to become indigenous church pastors is not generally planned or practiced.

As was the case with Raikes' Sunday school paradigm, the goal of the mission model centers on servicing and educating selected populations; they are not focused on planting churches per se. This differentiation between mission starting and church starting is key to the multi-site church discussion.

The Missions and Sunday Schools of First Baptist Church, Dallas, Texas

By the early 1880s, the idea of outpost Sunday school and church missions, analogous in some respects to Wesley's societies and chapels, had permeated into the landscape of the Southern Baptist Convention. In his work, *The First Baptist Church of Dallas: A Centennial History (1868-1968)*, Leon McBeth presents what some may perceive as a precursor to multi-site churches. As McBeth recounts,

As early as January, 1883, the church appointed a "mission board" for the church . . . to find sites in Dallas that needed missions or mission Sunday schools, raise any needed money to sponsor such, and make plans toward employment of a permanent city missionary to carry on their work. Their intention was to see that every part of the growing city should have access to the Gospel, and that no neighborhood or class of people should be neglected.

By 1885 the church was sponsoring at least four missions in major sections of

²⁶For broader examples of mission ministries, see Francis M. DuBose, "Alternative Church Models for an Urban Society," in *The Urban Challenge*, ed. Larry L. Rose and C. Kirk Hadaway (Nashville: Broadman, 1982), 131.

Dallas. Eventually all of these became separate churches. When the missions became strong enough to become independent of the mother church, the separation was friendly and helpful, with First Baptist Church contributing both members and money to get them well started.²⁷

As First Baptist Church of Dallas worked to reach the city with the gospel, they used the mother-daughter approach to church planting, and they simultaneously employed external Sunday schools to reach into populations unreached or underserved with the gospel.²⁸ As is the case with most large churches that launch satellite chapels, other types of outpost missions also resulted.²⁹ This was clearly the case with First

²⁷Leon McBeth, *The First Baptist Church of Dallas: Centennial History (1868-1968)* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1968), 85. For further commentary on the development of FBC mission chapels throughout Dallas, see pp. 66, 104, 127, and 278-81. Through 1968, McBeth documents 22 “church sponsored chapels and special ministries,” including the names of ministries, their locations, dates established, and church names for those that become independent congregations. *Ibid.*, 354.

²⁸*Ibid.*, 59.

²⁹Vaughan, *The Large Church*, 58. From this material, it is clear that several similarities exist between the church extension model utilized by First Baptist Church of Dallas (FBCD) and the multi-site church model in place today. However, several aspects of FBCD’s structure preclude it from consideration as a multi-site church.

First, while reaching an entire community (city, county, metropolitan area) with the gospel is a common driving force in the activities of both historic FBCD and many current multi-site churches, the method by which they go about the process is much different. FBCD was interested in creating additional churches to reach unreached populations. Multi-site churches, while sometimes interested in planting new churches, are more inclined to expand by extend their church (sites) into unreached populations. In other terms, FBCD wanted to multiply new churches and multi-sites churches want to multiply new sites.

Second, in terms of structuring, both FBCD branch churches and sites of multi-site churches generally are staffed with an on-location pastor. The functions of these pastors, however, are different. The mission pastors of FBCD, though paid by and responsible to a mother church, functioned as a typical pastor fulfilling all the pastoral duties of an autonomous church. Conversely, in most multi-site churches the site leader is a campus pastor responsible for all pastoral duties except preaching and teaching during the main weekly worship gathering.

Third, when considering the issues of sustainability and autonomy, the philosophies of FBCD and current multi-sites are different. In FBCD’s choosing to spread the gospel throughout Dallas, it became clear that doing so would come at great cost to the church. Some of their branch church starts would become autonomous, thus leaving FBCD family entirely. In financial terms, this departure would provide little return on investment. For those branch starts that would not become autonomous (or self-sufficient), the church realized that continuing the ministry would mean indefinite maintenance costs. Paying for the building, staffing, and programming would largely fall on the shoulders of the mother church.

Most multi-site churches, while perhaps open to the possibility of their sites becoming autonomous, would not initiate new sites with the intention of those sites becoming a new, autonomous church. Further, it is doubtful that most current multi-site churches would purposely launch a new site of their church if they perceived that the site would not be able to pay for itself immediately or after a few

Baptist Church of Dallas. For them, “Sunday school [became] the basis of the entire city mission work. The records of the church are replete with references...of branch schools operating in various sections of the city.”³⁰ John Vaughan verifies the continued extension of the branch operations by the church: “[FBC Dallas] had three satellite missions in 1897, eight in 1948, and seventeen in 1984.”³¹ Commenting on six of the these branches and their Sunday schools (in 1969), Towns illuminates their structure and composition:

The mission Sunday schools at these outlying locations have approximately 500 to 600 in attendance. Thirteen Sunday school buses go out from the downtown church and transport people to these missions, two of which meet in the downtown facility, and four of which are located in West Dallas. They are not economically self-supporting, being located in economically deprived neighborhoods. The Director of the Missions Ministry sits in on the cabinet meeting of the staff at the downtown church. Each mission has a full-time pastor, associate, and secretary. Many laymen work in these missions. One mission is conducted in Spanish, another in sign language, and the other four in English.³²

While the First Baptist Church of Dallas, Texas, was not a multi-site church, their methodology of reaching an extended geographic area from a base or hub church is helpful in piecing together the framework of multi-site ministry developments, especially as it related to the Key Church Strategy to be discussed later in this chapter. FBCD and

years. Lack of financial viability for a new site would likely preclude the initiation of that site before it even began.

³⁰McBeth, *The First Baptist Church of Dallas*, 59.

³¹Vaughan, *The Large Church*, 51.

³²Elmer Towns, *The Ten Largest Sunday Schools and What Makes Them Grow* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1969), 44. It is noteworthy that First Baptist Dallas was not afraid of trying innovations. As early as 1954, they were experimenting with multiple-venue, multi-generational worship onsite. McBeth explains that while dealing with overcrowding problems at FBC Dallas, “Pastor Criswell suggest [the church] establish a separate Youth Church to meet in Embree Hall during the regular worship hour on Sunday In the fall of 1954, services were begun for young people, ages 8-16. They have their own choir, choir director, and their own preacher, Bob Norman, who was a BSU [Baptist Student Union] director at SMU [Southern Methodist University]. However, members could only be received by the main

other churches that operated with a similar outreach strategy were instrumental in creating the paradigm of one church spreading the ministry of the church to more than one place.

Mark A. Matthews and the Branch System of Seattle’s First Presbyterian Church, Seattle, Washington

When Mark A. Matthews (1867-1940) trekked to Seattle, Washington, from Jackson, Tennessee, in 1902 to assume the pastorate of Seattle’s First Presbyterian Church, it is doubtful that many were aware of the impact Matthews would have on the church or upon the community to which they would minister.³³ Already having established prominence as a capable leader and brilliant church systems organizer in Dalton, GA, and later in Jackson, TN, Matthews and his brand of Christianity “included a combination of frontier evangelical revivalism, Old School Presbyterianism theology, and modern Social Gospel strategies.”³⁴ As Dale Sowden explains further, “This amalgam produced an individual who was extremely self-confident about his ability to change the very nature of the communities in which he lived. Few Seattleites understood the intensity of that confidence or the clarity of his vision for a righteous city.”³⁵

church.” Within a year, the program was discontinued, but “it was an effort to gear worship and evangelism directly to the needs of children.” McBeth, *The First Baptist Church of Dallas*, 273.

³³Dale E. Sowden, *The Reverend Mark Matthews: An Activist in the Progressive Era* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2001), 39-40.

³⁴Ibid., 39.

³⁵Ibid., 40. Sowden expounds on Matthews’ drive and aura: “Once in Seattle, Matthews rapidly increased membership in the First Presbyterian Church and attempted to impart a complex worldview to his parishioners. From attitudes toward gender, the home, and the workplace to issues of cultural authority and the roles of the church in the larger society, Matthews attempted to shape the nature of his congregations understanding . . . [His] quest for urban righteousness led him to embrace the strategizes of the Social Gospel and most of the reforms associated with the Progressive movement.” Ibid., xv.

Almost upon his arrival, Matthews began to establish a matrix of outreach and community ministry consistent with tenets of the “institutional church” concept. Within this conceptual framework, the “church attempted to meet almost every social need of the individual.”³⁶ Matthews used this approach to target the middle and working classes of the Seattle metropolitan area. As he applied his principles, he challenged his people to develop church properties across the city. Within the next few years, First Presbyterian established six new churches.³⁷

Key to the growth and expansion of his church were Matthews’ branch Sunday school and church system. With a keen mind for organization and management and a strong desire to incorporate business principles into the function of his ministry, Matthews created a complex outreach system crafted explicitly to reach into every part of Seattle.³⁸ The system worked well. Sowden shares why:

First Presbyterian became known throughout the country for this ability both to spawn new churches and to build a branch system that allowed it to surpass every other congregation in the denomination in membership. The case of Boulevard Park, located just south of Seattle in the community of Des Moines, provides a good example of how the branch system worked. In this instance, the community had

³⁶Ibid., 30. Sowden continues by detailing the vehicles used to meet those needs: “kindergartens, gymnasiums, classes, libraries, employment services, loan funds, game rooms, soup kitchens, and many other [similar] programs.” Ibid., 31. Hudnut-Beumler explains the concept further: “For the clergy, institutional churches offered the promise of achieving all aspects of church work that the progressive Era religious leader thought necessary, in part through specialization. Because they were heavily programmatic operations, institutional church is required both larger physical plants in larger staffs to operate. It was in these churches that the use of multiple seminary trained clergy and other professionals quickly grew. A neighborhood or rural church might, if you were lucky, have a full-time minister and a part-time caretaker. An institutional church, on the other hand, might have many full-time individuals detailed to teaching, working with youths, visiting with the elderly, directing social service work, preparing and serving meals, and keeping the building clean and open, not to mention the traditional task of preaching and the gargantuan task of administering a complex program.” James Hudnut-Beumler, *In Pursuit of The Almighty’s Dollar: A History of Money and American Protestantism* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2007), 138.

³⁷Those locations included West Seattle, South Park, the University District, Georgetown, Green Lake, and Interbay. Ibid., 55.

³⁸Ibid., 52.

grown to about a thousand people, and a group of Christians had found a school building in which to meet. They contacted First Presbyterian and an assistant pastor worked with a real estate agent to find a suitable lot. A Sunday school was first organized, and eventually a church was constructed. For several years, the assistants at First Presbyterian ministered to the branch church while receiving their salary from the main church. The parishioners focused on raising money to pay for the building and its maintenance The branch concept was simple: wherever the need existed, land would be secured and a building constructed. The membership would be recorded at First Presbyter (one of the reasons its total membership figures were too high), and the new church would be supported financially by the main congregation. Eventually, twenty-eight branch Sunday schools were created, and in part they helped account for the stupendous growth of the church.³⁹

In order to facilitate and manage the branch system structure, Matthews created and utilized an extensive leadership mechanism with First Presbyterian:

He installed a board of elders who helped organize a network of committees and departments, including the Departments of Executives, Finance, Purchase and Repair, Branch Sunday Schools, Members, Men's Work Evangelism, Bible Conference, Extension and Pulpit Supply, Young People, Main Sunday School Stewardship, Publicity, Oriental and Filipino Work, Colleges, Hospitality, Sympathy, Books, Visitation, Transportation, Special Service, Communion, Labor and Relief. Pairs of elders were assigned to twenty-four "circles" that coincided with the different neighborhoods in the city. These pairs called on all new members and helped integrate them into the life of the church.⁴⁰

In their hagiographic biography, *The Life of Mark A. Matthews: "Tall Pines of the Sierras,"* Ezra Giboney and Agnes Potter share more about the functionality of Matthews' branch system:

The entire machinery of the Church was organized to cause the twenty-eight Branch

³⁹Ibid., 55. Potter and Giboney give further perspective on the branch system: "It was in order to get more direct and efficient action that the Branch program was planned by Dr. Matthews. Feeders would be provided in this way, in addition to expanding the influence of the Main Church. Gain in prestige and ecclesiastical standing were made for the mutual benefit of everyone concerned. The newly organized units were relieved of the inferiority complexes incident to a small struggling Church. The were not only part of a great Church, they were all members of that Church, the pastor of the great Church was their pastor, too. Good work was done in each unit from the very beginning as trained leaders from the First Church manned the Sunday Schools until such a time as local workers were developed and member of the Session of the First Church greatly aided the new pastor of a unit." Ezra P. Giboney and Agnes M. Potter, *The Life of Mark A. Matthews: "Tall Pines of the Sierras"* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1948), 66-68.

⁴⁰Sowden, *The Reverend Mark Matthews*, 53.

Schools to syncretize with the Main School. Complete reports were made to him each month and referred to the department or the Session to which they belonged. Quarterly a Congress of all Sunday school workers was held at which Dr. Matthews gave challenging talks, new plans were formulated and mutual problems discussed.⁴¹

In many ways, Mark Matthews' First Presbyterian Church seems to be a multi-site church. One aspect of the church, however, which makes the church look so much like a multi-site is also the single attribute that removes it from multi-site classification. That attribute is its use of the branch system. Branch churches enabled First Presbyterian to place churches in more than one place, but by operating multiple churches, the branch system structure prevented First Presbyterian from being a single church expressing itself in more than one location. While it is clear that the relationship of the branch churches and the mother church was close (and in some ways integrally woven together), the branch churches remained semi-autonomous, preserving their right to become autonomous.

This distinction may seem small, but it stands at the core of multi-site identification. A multi-site church necessitates bilocation or multilocation, or more specifically the presence of a single entity existing simultaneously in two or more locations. While First Presbyterian was undoubtedly doing ministry in multiple locations, it was not being a single church in multiple locations.

⁴¹Giboney and Potter, *The Life of Mark A. Matthews*, 75. Giboney and Potter go on to describe Matthews' relationship to his "branches" in more detail: "It was a fatherly rather than an official relationship between Dr. Matthews and the branches. He looked upon each one with the same love and solicitude for its welfare and prosperity that a parent has in regard to his own child. They were a part of his very life. They were his children. They became quite a family. They were twenty-eight in all, including the Japanese and Chinese churches." *Ibid.*, 69.

J. Frank Norris—The Pastor of Two Churches: First Baptist Church, Fort Worth, Texas, and Temple Baptist Church, Detroit, Michigan

By most standards, J. Frank Norris (1877-1952) was an enigmatic figure.⁴²

His life was replete with challenges, and his ministry was embroiled in controversy from his early years until his death. C. Allyn Russell provides insight into Norris' background:

It is difficult to comprehend the turmoil that engulfed the man who claimed to serve the largest churches in the world. It began early in his life. J. Frank Norris was shot at the age of fifteen. During his years in college (Baylor), he led a student uprising that contributed to the resignation of the president of the institution. In the midst of his ministry, he was indicted and tried of arson, perjury, and murder. Nourished in the free-church, autonomous tradition of the 'denominational machine' both before and after his successive expulsions from a local pastors conference, the county association of which his church was a member, and the Baptist General Convention of Texas. The churches that Norris served suffered major splits, one of them losing six hundred members in a single year. Beset by enemies without and harassed, it would appear, by psychological problems within, he was a hardworking pastor-evangelist, publisher-editor, radio preacher, world traveler, and perennial politician. He became the leader simultaneously of two huge congregations, twelve hundred miles apart, as well as the head of a 'seminary' and the found of his own Fellowship of churches. A self-appointed foe of political communism, Norris toured the nation and the world. In his wake he left, in addition to thousands of converts, a record of acrimony, strife, and division. Ironically, his public ministry began in a place called Mount Calm, Texas. That was the closest J. Frank Norris ever came to serenity.⁴³

Even facing such numerous obstacles, Norris was able to accomplish a significant feat in multi-site (or multi-church) ministry. Over a period of sixteen years (1935-1951), Norris concurrently pastored two large churches. To best understand this arrangement, it would be most fruitful to consider Norris' personal account of his

⁴²See introduction of *God's Rascal* by Barry Hankins for a more detailed look synopsis of Norris' life. Barry Hankins, *God's Rascal: J. Frank Norris & the Beginnings of Southern Fundamentalism* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1996).

⁴³C. Allyn Russell, *Voices of American Fundamentalism: Seven Biographical Studies* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1976), 20-22.

ministry:

If the denominational leaders had kept their hands out and not interfered with the will of an independent local church, I never would have gotten to Detroit, but once I put my hand to the plow, and that meeting was launched there was no turning back.

Both churches by a silent vote unanimously agreed for me to divide my time between the two, and for two years both have enjoyed unprecedented prosperity and growth. The Fort Worth church decreased its indebtedness over \$120,000 during this time, and has had the greatest spiritual experience of its whole history, and going today as never before, averaging twenty to thirty additions every Sunday.

The Temple Baptist Church has increased its property [by] more than a quarter of a million dollars in these two years, and increased its membership four-fold, and these two churches now have the largest membership in the South and North, respectively, and not only the membership of the church, but the two largest Sunday Schools, with combined average attendance of around 6,000.

Therefore, here are two New Testament witnesses 1300 miles apart that are giving a concrete demonstration of the truth of the Word of God plus nothing and minus nothing, giving an unanswerable credential to the power of the gospel to save multitudes of hardened sinners in this day of twentieth century materialism. Hundreds of churches and pastors all over America have taken new heart by the example so these two witnesses are throwing off the grave clothes of ecclesiasticism and going forth witnessing for their risen and coming Lord.⁴⁴

In his day, criticism abounded for Norris and his dual pastorate concept. His

⁴⁴J. Frank Norris, "How Dual Pastorate Was Brought About," in *Inside History of First Baptist Church, Fort Worth, and Temple Baptist Church, Detroit: Life Story of Dr. J. Frank Norris*, ed. Joel A. Carpenter (New York: Garland Publishing, 1988), 270-71. Russell corroborates both the growth of Norris' ministry and the gusto used to achieve it: "There was no question about the increase in numbers. Norris' church at Fort Worth grew from 1,200 members in 1909 with an average attendance of 500 on Sunday mornings to over 12,000 in 1928 with an average attendance of 5,200. At Detroit, he began with 800 members late in 1934 and counted 8,597 in 1943. When Dallas Billington's mammoth Akron Baptist Temple finally surpassed the First Baptist Church at Fort Worth in the 1940's as the 'largest church in the world' with 21,000 persons, Norris worked a little harder and by 1946 boasted that his two congregations totaled a membership of 25,000 persons, 'the largest combined membership under one minister in the world.'" Russell, *Voices of American Fundamentalism*, 30-31.

It would be spurious, however, to assume that Norris was primarily responsible for the growth of his dual pastorate. Key to Norris' success both in Fort Worth and Detroit churches was the organizational prowess of Louis Entzminger (1876-1958). Towns explicates, "In 1913 [Entzminger] became the full-time Sunday school superintendent for J. Frank Norris (First Baptist Church, Fort Worth, Texas). Just two years earlier in 1911 an estimated 600 of the 1,200 members had left the church. Entzminger organized the Sunday school into groups, classes, and departments. The visitation efforts under his leadership with his pastor frequently reported 1,000 calls weekly. By 1928, First Baptist Church had developed the world's largest Sunday school with 12,000 members and an average attendance of 5,200." Elmer Towns, John Vaughan, and David Seifert, *The Complete Book of Church Growth*, 2nd ed. (Wheaton: Tyndale, 1990), 92-93. In reality, Entzminger's methods benefited several of the largest Sunday

regular 1200 plus mile voyage between the two locations was a questionable investment of resources, and when considered more fully, the entire arrangement borders on the absurd. Nevertheless, that Frank Norris pastored two churches for 16 years with such great distance between them is noteworthy. Norris' example is instructive for understanding two realities germane to the current multi-site church concept.⁴⁵

First, Norris' leadership and ministry demonstrate that one person can simultaneously lead two (large) churches over a significant distance for a significant time. No argument will be made here that this arrangement was healthy, but in practice, the model was functional. Second, throughout Norris' dual pastorate, a clear utilization of innovation was apparent. When Norris assumed the pastorate of Temple Baptist, he traveled to and from Fort Worth by train, and he later flew between the two places. Traversing such distances is more common today, but it remains outside the norm for a pastor to travel so far and so frequently between two churches that he pastors.

Precarious as it was, the Norris' paradigm demonstrates that societal and technological advancements can (and do) alter the landscape of church ministry and church models. Understanding and embracing innovation allowed Norris to do ministry in a novel way. In that sense, Norris was a forerunner of the multi-site church movement, and thus serves as an important component in the historic development of the multi-site church framework.

school programs of the era. See Louis Entzminger, *How to Organize and Administer a Great Sunday School* (Fort Worth: The Manning Company, 1949), for a list of the churches who employed his methods.

⁴⁵While his work is intriguing, the primary commonality that Norris' dual pastorate ministry has with multi-site churches of today is that one individual was doing ministry in two distant locations over an extended period. Though they may have shared much in common in terms of their principles and practice (cf. Sunday school methods of Louis Entzminger), First Baptist Church, Fort Worth, TX, and Temple Baptist Church, Detroit, MI were *two autonomous churches* operating in *two different locations*.

Lee Roberson's Highland Park Baptist Church, Chattanooga, Tennessee

When Lee Roberson (1909-2007) assumed the pastorate of Highland Park Baptist Church in 1942, the church had planted only one chapel, Central Avenue Mission, which launched in 1939. By 1984, the number of chapels had swelled to sixty. In his book *The Ten Largest Sunday Schools and What Makes Them Grow* (1969), Elmer Towns documents the role Roberson played in the expansion of the church satellite program and of the church ministry as a whole:

Highland Park Baptist Church is known as the Church of the *green light*. The church stationery has a printed traffic signal with a green light and the word *GO*. Under the leadership of Dr. Lee Roberson, this church has taken seriously the words of Jesus, "Go ye therefore into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature." This church is going in many ways: going through a daily half hour radio broadcast; going through *The Evangelist*, the weekly church paper with a circulation of 23,000; going through Camp Joy, a mission outreach project that gives free camping experiences to more than three thousand each summer; going through the fleet of 15 buses charged with visitation and evangelism of the greater Chattanooga area; [and] going through 43 mission outreach chapels.⁴⁶

Much in the vein of Mark Matthews, Roberson sought to reach the entire Chattanooga region through the chapel framework. He mobilized his people and their resources, and then Roberson created a leadership development system to facilitate better the increase of the chapels. John Vaughan elaborates on the specifics of Highland Park's chapel system:

The church now [in 1984] operates sixty chapels located as far as seventy miles from the main church. Many chapels average one hundred in attendance. The two largest have 250 to 300 attending each week. The chapels are led by students and faculty from Tennessee Temple University. Many chapels are owned and operated by Highland Park Baptist Church. During the first thirty years of the chapel

⁴⁶Towns, *The Ten Largest Sunday Schools*, 27.

ministry, approximately fifteen have become self-supporting, autonomous congregations.⁴⁷

Consistent with the above discussion of Seattle's First Presbyterian Church, Highland Park faced (and continues to face) the same challenge concerning the mission chapel or branch church system. Both churches reveal that mission or branch churches display, by design, a strong proclivity to shift one of two directions. These semi-autonomous churches either gravitate away from the mother church to become fully autonomous, or they gravitate toward deeper reliance upon the mother church and thus they become permanently dependent.⁴⁸

No category exists in the mission or branch system for churches to be somewhere in the middle of these positions. While it is conceivable that a branch church could become a multi-site church, within the historic branch church system, daughter churches do not alter their structure to become part of a single church expressing itself in two locations. Therefore, while satellite, branch, or mission churches may demonstrate multi-site tendencies, these churches historically have not made the necessary adjustments to actualize a multi-site church.⁴⁹

⁴⁷John N. Vaughan, *The World's Twenty Largest Churches: Church Growth Principles in Action* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1984), 110-11. One year later, Vaughan would write, "The foremost example of satellite ministry in the United States is the Highland Park Baptist Church [with its] 57,000-member congregation." Vaughan, *The Large Church*, 30.

⁴⁸In an interview with Towns, Lee Roberson validates this viewpoint: "These chapels have never supported themselves. If we were to cut them off and make them local missions, they would have to give up for financial reasons. The mother church underwrites them financially, supplies musical programs, and supplies preachers from Tennessee Temple Schools. Many of the chapel buildings have been purchased by the Highland Baptist Church and if the local congregation, which is usually in a very poor area, had to pay for the building, the work would never have begun. If a church is able to support itself full-time, it will be cut off and become indigenous." Towns, *Ten Largest Sunday Schools*, 32-33.

⁴⁹Consider the response of Highland Park pastor, David E. Bouler [1991-2008], about his church's being multi-site: "We started developing multiple ministries in 1942, and by 1970, had 70 off-campus sites. But in the past 14 years, [we have] let go of 37 satellite churches. We were so large that the

The Key Church Strategy

In the foreword to *One Church, Many Congregations: The Key Church Strategy*, Lyle Schaller heralds, “This book has been written to share what I believe is one of the most innovative, practical, and effective approaches to outreach ministry I have encountered in nearly four decades of working with congregations In simple terms, it boils down to the discovery that one congregation can meet in two different locations.”⁵⁰ Schaller’s words are direct and unequivocal. He esteems the Key Church Strategy as one of the most significant ministry models of his long tenure as a researcher and, more importantly, he credits J. Timothy Allen and J. V. Thomas with “discovering” that (repetition intended) “one congregation can meet in two different locations.”⁵¹ With this statement, Schaller suggests that the authors’ Key Church Strategy brought about the first multi-site church. In order to consider this possibility, an explanation of the strategy and a tracing of its development are in order.

Ahlen and Thomas maintain that the Key Church Strategy began in 1979, but the process for developing the concept came two years earlier in 1977.⁵² At that time,

people would go to the chapel service, but there was no sense of responsibility for their local church or their local community, and as we evaluated it, we noticed if we gave them responsibility along with owning the church and the property and accountability for it, there was a greater interest in evangelizing that local community in which that chapel was located.” Jennifer Ludden, “Big Churches Use Technology to Branch Out,” National Public Radio’s *All Things Considered*, 7 August 2005. At the time of writing, there is no evidence on the Highland Park Baptist Church website to suggest that the church supports mission chapels.

⁵⁰Lyle Schaller, foreword to *One Church, Many Congregations* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1999), 13.

⁵¹In the paragraph preceding this claim, Schaller states, “These two Texans have spent most of the last twenty years inventing, practicing, reflecting on, refining, testing, teaching, propagating, documenting, in building the philosophical, theological, and organizational framework for an exciting and effective strategy for evangelism.” *Ibid.*

⁵²Schaller places a strong connection between First Baptist Church, Dallas, TX, and the Key Church strategy: “The history of this particular strategy for plan that change can be traced back to the ministry of the First Baptist Church of Dallas, TX. For several decades that historic downtown church has sponsored a couple of dozen off-campus ministries directed at people who could not or would not come to

under the leadership of Joel Gregory, Gambrell Street Baptist Church of Fort Worth, Texas, had experienced measurable growth. That growth, however, came from a strong influx of transfer membership from other congregations (83 percent being from new members). While pleased with the increase, the Gambrell Street congregation was concerned about their inability to reach the changing populations surrounding the church building.⁵³ As the church looked for solutions to their problem, they encountered J. V. Thomas, who had recently assumed the Director of Project Development position with the Baptist General Convention of Texas.

As Thomas and the church together appraised their situation, Thomas recommended that Gambrell Street should “become an anchor, or *key* [emphasis original] church in the community, through which multiple new congregations would be started. The plan called for these new congregations to reflect the multiple cultures making up the neighborhood.”⁵⁴ The immediate result was positive. Schaller recounts, “The congregation and the State Convention cooperated in a pioneering venture . . . to establish a series of indigenous satellite churches and missions in that section of Fort Worth.”⁵⁵

the building that was housing this congregation. From the earliest days, this congregation had been engaged in starting and maintaining new ministries in the Dallas area. These efforts include satellite Sunday schools and home Bible groups. These ministries were and are designated to reach a wide range of ethnic minority residents of Dallas as well as people in jails and prisons, people who are hearing impaired, and residents of large apartment structures.” Lyle E. Schaller, *Innovations in Ministry: Models for the 21st Century* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1993), 70.

⁵³J. Timothy Ahlen and J. V. Thomas, *One Church, Many Congregations: The Key Church Strategy* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1999), 21.

⁵⁴*Ibid.*, 22.

⁵⁵Schaller, *Innovations in Ministry*, 71. Schaller comments further, “It should be noted that that the term *Key Church* [emphasis original] was first used as part of the Southern Baptist Convention’s Home Mission Board strategy called Bold Mission Thrust.” *Ibid.*, 71. The Bold Mission Thrust challenge was presented to the 1976 annual meeting of the Southern Baptist Convention (SBC) by the Missions Challenge Committee in response to “Bold Mission” goals established by the Foreign Mission Board [now International Mission Board (IMB) and Home Mission Board [now North American Mission Board (NAMB)] for the year 2000 AD. This resolution called for members, churches, and institutions of the SBC

The long-term impact was also positive. “As of 1997,” Ahlen reports, “300 Southern Baptist churches located in 27 different states have adopted the Key Church Strategy. The total Bible study attendance of these churches is 172,152 people!”⁵⁶

Explaining the concept in its most basic form, The Key Church Strategy calls for a commitment from a single key church to reach its neighboring community through developing a series of outpost congregations.⁵⁷ The key church, through its own leadership and membership base, initiates these new congregations for the explicit purpose of reaching unreached or underserved niche populations in order to evangelize and congregationalize them.⁵⁸ According to Ahlen and Thomas, in the case of Gambrell

to create "aggressive, sacrificial, and bold promotional programs" in order to foster stronger obedience to the Great Commission. “Resolution on Mission Challenge,” June 1976, Southern Baptist Conventions Resolutions [on-line]; accessed 20 June 2010; available from www.sbc.net/resolutions/amResolution.asp?ID=767; Internet. For an assessment of the Bold Mission Thrust, see Mike Clingenpeel, “Bold Mission Thrust after 25 years,” *Biblical Recorder*, 20 April 2001.

⁵⁶Ahlen and Thomas, *One Church, Many Congregations*, 19. Two years earlier, a detailed survey was administered to evaluate the national success of the Key Church Strategy. Here are the findings: “In 1995, a questionnaire was mailed to Key Churches. A report was received from 212 churches, only 40 of which had been using the Key Church Strategy for more than three years. The Bible study attendance and those 40 key churches’ satellite congregations totaled 33,807 that year. They baptized 6616 new converts. Take this as an average over a three-year period: 19,848 persons were converted to Christ and baptized into the mission congregations. Nearly 59 percent of the Bible study attenders were newly baptized believers. Taken together, all 212 Key Churches reported 20,123 baptisms in 1995. This is an average of 95 persons won to Christ and baptized per Key Church in addition to churches planted, these Key Churches also started 398 new community ministries. The 212 Key Churches are currently sponsoring 887 new mission churches. In 1995, the last year for which complete records are available, these churches started 262 new congregations. The average Key Church is sponsoring four congregations; two-thirds of these churches have been using the Key Church Strategy fewer than three years.” *Ibid.*, 63-64.

⁵⁷According to Schaller, “The Baptist General Convention of Texas defines a Key Church as one that meets these six criteria: (1) makes a long-term commitment to make missions outreach a top priority; (2) prioritizes missions to the level of the church’s religious education and music programs; (3) establishes a Missions Development council; (4) elects a director/minister of missions to lead missions expansion; (5) begins five mission/ministry units each year; and (6) sponsors at least five dependent or pre-independent satellite units on a continuous basis. Each regional judicatory must define the criteria that are consistent with its strategy, goals, values and resources.” Schaller, *Innovations in Ministry*, 73. See also, Joseph E. Early, Jr., *A Texas Baptist History Sourcebook: A Companion to McBeth's Texas Baptists* (Denton: University of North Texas Press, 2004), 554-57.

⁵⁸J. V. Thomas, *Investing in Eternity: The Indigenous Satellite Church Strategy* (Dallas: J. V. Thomas, 1991), 2.

Street Baptist Church (by 1992) there were three distinct types of congregations: (1) church-type congregations, (2) indigenous satellite congregations, and (3) multihousing congregations. Their explanation of these congregation types is helpful:

1. *Church-type congregations.* These congregations were traditional churches started to reach specific unchurched groups of people. Gambrell Street sponsored 10 church-type congregations. They included a Nigerian, two African American, a middle-class Anglo, two Hispanic, a Japanese, a Chinese, a Cambodian, and a working-class Anglo church. In each case, the goal was to plant new churches that would one day be completely self-supporting, self-governing, and self-propagating.
2. *Indigenous Satellite Congregations.* These congregations, mostly house churches, ministered to the needs of the blue-collar residents of the surrounding neighborhoods. While each was encouraged to become as autonomous as possible, all parties involved recognized the value of a strong ongoing relationship to the sponsor church. Gambrell Street sponsored nineteen indigenous satellite congregations.
3. *Multihousing congregations.* Seven congregations held services in donated apartments. Multihousing congregations are special examples of indigenous satellite congregations. Like house churches, they also minister to blue-collar people. In addition to depending on the sponsor church for support, multi-housing congregations rely on the apartment management for permission to minister on the property.⁵⁹

Interestingly, in his book *Innovations in Ministry* (written five years earlier than the Ahlen and Thomas book fully devoted to the topic), Schaller includes a fourth designation within the Key Church structure. He describes these as “‘mission ministries’ that are not able to evolve into autonomous worshiping communities. These usually are located in institutional settings such as nursing homes, prisons, drug rehabilitation centers, and hospitals.”⁶⁰

Central to the Key Church Strategy construct is the Indigenous Satellite

⁵⁹Ahlen and Thomas, *One Church, Many Congregations*, 22-23.

⁶⁰Schaller, *Innovations in Ministry*, 72.

Church (ISC) model. According to Ahlen and Thomas, an ISC is,

A mission church . . . that meets in an apartment, a storefront, a house, or other type of facility. It is a congregation that is culturally and linguistically in harmony with the people surrounding it, and finds within itself the potential to govern, support, and reproduce itself. It may continue as a permanent part of the sponsoring church's evangelism, outreach, and Bible study program (as an indigenous satellite church), or it may become autonomous.⁶¹

In this definition, the authors meld together the ideas of a satellite ministry and a satellite church. For example, they count a Bible study (program) as an indigenous satellite church or congregation. While such a gathering may indeed be a small group that could one day become an autonomous church, there is little to substantiate this existing entity as a satellite church. In reality, the ISC is a mission satellite, demonstrating (1) a heavy reliance upon the sponsor church for resourcing, and (2) a clear focus on evangelizing and discipling population segments.

Apparently, the word “church” was added to the ISC acronym at a latter point. In his earlier manual of *Investing in Eternity: The Indigenous Church Strategy*, J. V. Thomas produced the work under the title, *Indigenous Satellite Unit Manual*.⁶² Charles Chaney also uses the Indigenous Satellite Unit (ISU) nomenclature (1991) as does Toby Druin in a 2003 summary article detailing the history of the Key Church concept.⁶³ The earlier ISU title is probably more fitting to the identity of these groups. While these

⁶¹Ahlen and Thomas, *One Church, Many Congregations*, 121. The authors also provide an additional definition: “An Indigenous Satellite Church (ISC) is a *single-cell church that remains a permanent part of the sponsoring church*” (emphasis added). The purpose of the ISC is to reach and disciple non-Christians and other unchurched people. *Ibid.*, 78.

⁶²Thomas, *Investing in Eternity*, xi.

⁶³Charles L. Chaney, *Church Planting at the End of the Twentieth Century*, rev. ed. (Wheaton: Tyndale House, 1991), 123; Toby Druin, “KEY CHURCHES: Missions Growth Unlock” *Baptist Standard* 3 October 2003 [on-line]; accessed 21 June 2010; available from http://bs.newvoicemedia.org/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=945; Internet.

indigenous satellites may indeed transition into “churches” at some point, they begin (and apparently most continue) simply as dependent “units.” This line of reasoning seems to best capture Thomas’ description of an ISC: “The Indigenous Satellite Church (ISC) is a church-type mission that remains a permanent part of the sponsoring church. The purpose of the ISC is to reach and disciple the unsaved and unchurched.”⁶⁴

Throughout the 1980s and 1990s, churches inside Texas and throughout the Southern Baptist Convention and other denominations embraced the Key Church Strategy and contextualized it to their setting.⁶⁵ One of the best known examples of the Key Church Strategy is the ministry of First Baptist Church (FBC), Arlington, Texas, and Mission Arlington (now Mission Metropolis), which began in 1986. FBC Arlington, under the leadership of pastor Charles Wade, elected to become a Key Church and promptly hired Tillie Burgin to become their minister of missions. Having served as a missionary in South Korea with the Foreign Mission Board of the Southern Baptist Convention, Burgin had a keen understanding of developing ministries groups. Additionally, before her employment with FBC Arlington, Burgin served as the personnel director for the Arlington Independent School District (ISD) (1983-1986). Fusing her skills and experience in public administration and missions, Burgin began looking for new ministry venues within area apartment communities. The concept of

⁶⁴Thomas, *Investing in Eternity*, 1. Immediately following this statement, Thomas says, “An indigenous congregation is self-supporting, self-governing, self-multiplying, and shares the culture of the people in which it is planted.” While this description may be true of fully developed ISC, it is certainly not true of ISUs at their initiation and likely throughout their maturation process. Ibid.

⁶⁵Included in the list of these churches are Moberly Baptist Church, Longview, TX; Mission Arlington/First Baptist Church, Arlington, TX; First Baptist Church, Dallas, TX; Lakeside Baptist Church, Dallas, TX; Centro Familiar Cristiano Buenas Nuevas (Good News Christian Family Center), Santa Anna, CA; Kirby Woods Baptist Church, Memphis, TN; *Inglesia Bautista Resurreccion*, Miami, FL; Celebration

launching Bible studies in multihousing communities met with great success, and Burgin (along with her family) worked diligently to expand the ministry reach of FBC

Arlington.⁶⁶ Charles Chaney explains the ministry's early success:

At the time the program was launched, First Baptist averaged eleven hundred on Sunday morning in two worship services. By the end of 1991, there were 125 ISUs with two thousand in attendance. The First Baptist Church had increased its average attendance in downtown Arlington to nineteen hundred in Sunday school.⁶⁷

Thirteen years later, Rick Rusaw and Eric Swanson in *The Externally Focused Church*, would also write of Burgin's perennial success:

Today [2004] Mission Arlington comprises nearly 250 community house churches (with nearly four thousand people in attendance) serving thousands of people a week in the Arlington community by offering such things as food, clothing, furniture, school supplies, medical and dental care, school transportation, child and adult day care, afterschool programs for eleven hundred kids at 46 locations, counseling, conversational English, citizenship classes, and job assistance.... Although the square-block Ministry Center is burgeoning with love and compassion, the real ministry takes place in the 247 house churches scattered in homes and apartments around Arlington.⁶⁸

The Key Church Strategy, while important in fostering the idea of doing church in more than one location, still falls short of the multi-site church designation.

While Schaller may dispute this finding, aspects of the Key Church arrangement do not

Church, Metairie, LA; Clarkston Baptist Church, Clarkston, GA; and Kings Highway Baptist Church, St. Louis, MO. Thomas and Ahlen, *One Church, Many Congregations*, 135-49.

⁶⁶Ahlen and Thomas, *One Church, Many Congregations*, 92. For a more detailed discussion of Tillie Burgin and the ministry of Mission Arlington, see Erma H. Mathis, *Mission Arlington: Out to Change the World* (Birmingham, AL: Woman's Missionary Union, 2000); and idem, *The Mission Arlington Story: Tillie's Vision* (Fort Worth: Scripta, 1996). See also Toby Druin, "Mission Arlington Does Mission Impossible," *Baptist Standard*, 9 February 2000 [on-line]; accessed 21 June 2010; available from www.baptiststandard.com/2000/2_9/pages/arlington.html; Internet.

⁶⁷Chaney, *Church Planting at the End of the Twentieth Century*, 122-23.

⁶⁸Rick Rusaw and Eric Swanson, *The Externally Focused Church* (Loveland, CO: Group, 2004), 62-63. See Celebration Church's description of "extension gatherings." "Extension Gatherings," Celebration Church [on-line]; accessed 17 April 2009; available from www.celebrationchurch.org/main/extension/; Internet. Celebration Church provides an example of a church moving from a Key Church Strategy toward a multi-site strategy.

fit within multi-site definitional boundaries. Two specific areas where Key Churches breach these boundaries are in (1) the realm of autonomy (each ISC or ISU has the opportunity to become an independent church) and (2) the realm of ecclesiology (the various outlying ISCs or ISUs are not always churches).

Reminiscent of Mark Matthews' First Presbyterian Church and in some respects a modified recapitulation of the First Baptist Church, Dallas' outpost Sunday school and satellite structure, the Key Church Strategy's greatest novelty is its use of ISCs (ISUs) to reach a larger variety of niche populations within a specific area. The Key Church Strategy also provides a vital step in the connection between multi-site ministries and multi-site churches. As will become clear shortly, the idea of one church operating in multiple locations was gaining more consideration in church leadership and planting circles throughout the latter half of the twenty century.

Conclusion

To this point, it has been demonstrated that while components of the multi-site church concept were visible within the seven ministry models above, none of them fits within the definition of a true multi-site church as set forth in the first chapter. While these examples *do not* encompass all multiple-site ministry innovations utilized throughout United States history, they do serve as a valid representation of multi-site type ministry that was taking place.⁶⁹

As the twentieth century began, branch Sunday schools and satellite

⁶⁹Admittedly, historic ministry anomalies that satisfy the multi-site church definition may exist. However, it would seem that such ministries would be a random variance, and thus of limited importance within the scope of this study.

congregations served as potent tools in evangelizing and congregationalizing the American landscape. As the century ended, a similar, but different expansion mechanism was emerging. Aided by a host of social, economic, and technological factors, the concept of “doing” and “being” church in more than one place morphed from an idea to a new church formulation. The discussion will now turn toward examining those changes that facilitated the emergence of the multi-site church.

CHAPTER 3

CATALYTIC FACTORS INSTRUMENTAL TO THE EMERGENCE OF THE MULTI-SITE CHURCH

Introduction

The discussion will now turn toward assessing the convergence of economic, mobility, and technical factors that led to a cultural landscape ripe for the introduction of multi-site innovations.¹ Throughout this chapter, the argument will be made that multi-site churches (as defined in chapter one) did not begin until the latter half of the twenty-first century, and that the origin of the multi-site church movement is attributable to societal changes that took place following World War II.

Three Catalytic Factors in the Emergence of Multi-site Churches

In 2005, Thomas L. Friedman authored *The World Is Flat: A Brief History of the Twenty-First Century*. Within it, Friedman tackles the concept of globalization, analyzing the impact of advancements in science and technology upon the connectivity of the world. Playing on the historic misconception that the world was a flat surface

¹The impact of these social changes on multi-site development and expansion are similar to the accelerators that facilitated the gospel's dissemination across the Roman Empire. The *Pax Romana*, the Roman road systems, the *lingua franca* of Greek, and the framework of Jewish synagogues provided "invaluable pathways for the spread of the gospel" in the early church. Michael Green, *Evangelism in the Early Church* (Guildford, UK: Eagle, 1995), 13-31. See Green's first chapter, "Pathways for Evangelism," for a more elaborate discussion on this topic, or see John Mark Terry, *Evangelism: A Concise History* (Nashville: Broad & Holman, 1994), 3-5. Consider also Meeks' discussion on "mobility" during the Pauline era. Wayne A. Meeks, *The First Urban Christians: The Social World of the Apostle Paul*, 2nd ed. (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2003), 16-23.

(instead of a sphere), Friedman introduces and explores a series of ten “flatteners” that he credits with flattening the world.² As these flatteners converged in the 1990s, they initiated a global social and technological matrix in which boundaries of economics, politics, and organization, began to dissipate rapidly.³ The result of this convergence is, according to Friedman, a world that is smaller, more connected, more integrated, and more “flat” than ever.

One could make the argument that the multi-site church concept, and specifically the “multi-site church revolution” as coined by Surratt, Ligon, and Bird, emerged from the flattening processes detailed by Friedman. Even before Friedman wrote *The World is Flat*, however, a series of different forces or flatteners were affecting massive change in the United States. Initiated at the end of World War II, three potent forces of economic advancement, accelerated mobility, and technological innovation began to reshape and to redefine many aspects of American culture. As these forces rippled throughout society, their existence and implications began to challenge numerous assumptions and practices of churches and their leaders. In time, innovative church leaders committed to the Great Commission (Matt 28:18-20) embraced and subdued these three forces and the challenges they wrought. As a result, through a blending of trials, errors, and risks, the multi-site church concept was born.

Three catalytic factors were crucial to the emergence of the multi-site church

²Friedman’s list of tens flatteners include “11/9/89, 8/9/95, workflow software, uploading, outsourcing, off shoring, supply-chaining, insourcing, in-forming, and the steroids.” Thomas L. Friedman, *The World Is Flat: A Brief History of the Twenty-First Century* (New York: Picador, 2007), 50-199. Cf. Friedman’s flatteners with Schaller’s discussion in Lyle E. Schaller, *The Very Large Church: New Rules for Leaders* (Nashville: Abingdon, 2000), 88.

³Friedman, *The World Is Flat*, 200-32.

concept. Without any one of them, it is unlikely that the multi-site church as defined would be in existence today.⁴ At least four sources allude to some or all of these catalytic forces. First, Surratt, Ligon, and Bird say, “Digital technologies combined with growing social acceptance of branch-church ideas, have made a new movement possible today.”⁵ Second, in discussing mega-churches and one multi-site church in particular, Towns, Stetzer, and Bird say, “two explosive factors . . . that have shaped our society in the past 40 years These two factors are (1) the interstate freeway, and (2) the computerized television screen.”⁶ Third, Towns also links multi-site churches or “the extended

⁴Certainly, other factors are partially responsible for the development of multi-site churches. For example, Towns contends that “new expressions [and dynamics of church] leadership” made the multi-site [multi-campus] ministry possible. Elmer Towns, C. Peter Wagner, and Thom S. Rainer, *The Everychurch Guide to Growth: How Any Plateaued Church Can Grow* (Nashville: Broadman and Holman, 1998), 129. Compare these findings with Christian Smith’s acknowledgement of “entrepreneurial leaders.” Christian Smith, *American Evangelicalism: Embattled and Thriving* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 86-87.

Further, credit should be given in part to the work of Donald McGavran, who inaugurated a movement determined to find the most effective ways of reaching more people with the gospel. Towns, Wagner, and Rainer explain, “under the influence of Donald McGavran, the modern father of the Church Growth Movement, a new emphasis on discovering, clarifying, and applying the principles of church growth arose. These principles are the laws to grow a church. When leaders follow these laws/principles, their churches grow. Out of the Church Growth Movement came a multitude of books explaining the principles of how to grow a church, and, at the same time, books on barriers and diseases of church growth. People wanting to grow a church read these books and articles and attended conferences/conventions. Then they went home and began to grow churches by these principles.” Towns, Wagner, and Rainer, *The Everychurch Guide to Growth*, 128. Alan Hirsch links the influence of McGavran to multi-site churches more succinctly with his assertion that “the church-growth movement ushered in the era of the contemporary church, the megachurch, and the multisite phenomenon.” Alan Hirsch, foreword to *Exponential: How You and Your Friends Can Start A Missional Church Movement* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2010), 11. For other examples of social factors contributing to multi-site, see Elmer L. Towns, *A Practical Encyclopedia of Evangelism and Church Growth* (Ventura, CA: Regal, 1995), 103-04. Despite these important dynamics, the argument here is that three key factors created a milieu in which multi-site churches could appear. Without these three, other factors would not suffice to bring about multi-site churches.

⁵Geoff Surratt, Greg Ligon, and Warren Bird, *Multi-Site Church Revolution* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2006), 91-92.

⁶Elmer Towns, *10 of Today’s Most Innovative Churches* (Ventura, CA: Regal, 1990), 204.

geographical church” to “the emergence of an urban mindset and a ‘consumer approach to ministry.’”⁷ Fourth, according to John Hammett, “much in the multi-site [church] movement assumes and depends upon modern communication, ease of travel, and technology.”⁸ The conclusions above, combined with the existing writing and research on multi-site churches, point to three factors as *essential* to the dawn of the multi-site church: (1) economic advancement, (2) accelerated mobility, and (3) technological innovation. Each of these catalytic factors will now be addressed in detail.

Factor 1: Economic Advancement

Following World War II, the United States found itself in a precarious situation. Before the War, Americans felt the deep pain of the Great Depression, and an impending fear remained that the country sat on the verge of another financial shock.⁹ At the same time, no major battles had taken place on the American mainland, so the economic war machine that produced massive amounts of war supplies and armaments was primed to maintain economic and industrial momentum.¹⁰ As American leaders pondered how to readjust the nation to bolster the economy and prevent financial cataclysm, a new economic ideology found growing favor.

In 1936, John Maynard Keynes published the *General Theory of Employment*,

⁷Ibid., 237-38.

⁸John Hammett, “Have We Ever Seen This Before? Multi-Site Precedents,” *9Marks eJournal* May/June 2009, 1 [on-line]; accessed 30 June 2010; available from <http://www.9marks.org/ejournal/have-we-ever-seen-multi-site-precedents>; Internet.

⁹Gary R. Edgerton, *The Columbia History of American Television* (New York: The Columbia University Press, 2007), 80.

¹⁰Thomas K. McCraw, *American Business since 1920: How It Worked*, 2nd ed. (Wheeling, IL: Harlan Davidson, 2009), 62.

Interest, and Money.¹¹ Within the work, he presented an explanation for why the Great Depression began and why it continued. Keynes offered a novel view of economics for his day. Instead of addressing economic concerns on a microeconomic level, he addressed problems and solutions from a macro-perspective through macroeconomics.¹² Key to his understanding of economic systems is the idea that supply and demand control inflation and depression. John Steele Gordon describes Keynes' reasoning as follows: "If there is too much supply, depression results; too much demand and inflation breaks out."¹³ His solution to this twin problem was simple: achieve a balance between the two. While it would take time for "Keynesianism" to find acceptance throughout the American economic system, tenets of Keynes thinking found immediate reception.¹⁴

By no means was the growth of the postwar era solely attributable to Keynesian economics; nevertheless, growth ensued in the American economy: "In the five years that followed the war [1945-1950], the gross national product climbed from \$213 billion to \$284 billion, and the national income from \$181 million to \$241

¹¹John Maynard Keynes, *General Theory of Employment, Interest, and Money* (London: Macmillan and Co., 1936).

¹²John Steele Gordon, *An Empire of Wealth: The Epic History of American Economic Power* (San Francisco: HarperCollins, 204), 379.

¹³Ibid.

¹⁴In many ways, the Employment Act of 1946 was the governmental ratification of Keynesianism. Jones explains the Act's effect: "The Employment Act of 1946 is the most important single piece of economic legislation of the entire postwar period. It created a clear legal obligation on the part of the federal government to use all practicable means "to promote maximum employment, production, and purchasing power, and it created the basic core of machinery for such economic planning." Peter d'A. Jones, *The Consumer Society: A History of American Capitalism* (Baltimore: Penguin, 1965), 334. See also, Stephen Kemp Bailey, *Congress Makes a Law: The Story behind the Employment Act of 1946* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1950); and Robert M. Collins, *The Business Response to Keynes, 1929-1964* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1981).

billion.”¹⁵ By the time John F. Kennedy became president in 1961, “full-blown Keynesianism was adopted.”¹⁶

Within Keynesianism, one finds the dualistic concept that a simultaneous reduction in interest rates and an increase in governmental spending on infrastructure generate a cascading effect in the growth of an economy. This growth, in turn, then leads to economic stability and health. Combining the Keynesian paradigm, the national confidence elevated by a global war victory, and a desire to make up for time and life lost in the Depression era, Americans welcomed a new way of life and thinking: consumerism.¹⁷ Industries transitioned quickly from making destruction goods to domestic goods, and American families began buying new products with money stashed in savings since the Great Depression.¹⁸

Adding to the economic acceleration in the United States was the homecoming of twelve million soldiers. Before their return en masse, Franklin D. Roosevelt signed The Servicemen's Readjustment Act (GI Bill of Rights) into law on June 22, 1944. This legislation would prove immensely beneficial to the troops, to the postwar economy, and to national growth and development for the rest of the century.¹⁹ Embedded within this

¹⁵Thomas C. Reeves, *Twentieth-Century America: A Brief History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 139.

¹⁶Gordon, *Empire of Wealth*, 379.

¹⁷Bruce Shelley and Marshall Shelley, *The Consumer Church: Can Evangelicals Win the World without Losing Their Souls?* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1992), 27.

¹⁸Edgerton, *History of American Television*, 80.

¹⁹*Ibid.*, 79-80; 157.

act were a series of dispensations for veterans. The two most significant dealt with education and housing. Regarding education for veterans, the government provisioned low-cost, government guaranteed loans for anyone who had served in the military for at least ninety days, and exited service with an honorable discharge “regardless of age, sex, race, religion, or family status.”²⁰ Through the educational benefit, “Nearly eight million GIs pursued some form of schooling, at a cost to taxpayers of \$14.5 billion. The college populations soared from 1.4 million in 1940 to 3.2 million in 1960.”²¹

While the price was steep, the investment in the American educational system and, more importantly, the knowledge and skill base of Americans yielded exponential dividends.²² Historian Milton Greenberg explains why:

By the time initial GI Bill eligibility for World War II veterans expired in 1956—about 11 years after final victory—the United States was richer by 450,000 trained engineers, 240,000 accountants, 238,000 teachers, 91,000 scientists, 67,000 doctors, 22,000 dentists, in more than 1 million other college-educated individuals. These college graduates raised expectations throughout the country and their skilled labor contributed to a burgeoning and literate technological middle-class.²³

As this newly educated crop of white-collar workers graduated, they possessed both the flexibility and mobility to assume new jobs and new lives at new destinations across the country.

²⁰Milton Greenberg, “The GI Bill of Rights: Changing the Social, Economic Landscape of the United States,” 2, *Historians on America*, 3 April 2008 [on-line]; accessed 23 June 2010; available from www.america.gov/st/educ-english/2008/April/20080423213340eafas0.8454951.html; Internet. See also, Milton Greenberg, *The GI Bill: The Law That Changed America* (New York: Lickle Publishing, 1997); Edward Humes, *Over Here: How the G.I. Bill Transformed the American Dream* (Orlando: Harcourt, 2006); and Michael J. Bennett, *When Dreams Came True: The GI Bill and the Making of Modern America* (Washington, DC: Brassey’s, 1996).

²¹Reeves, *Twentieth-Century America*, 139-40.

²²See Gordon, *An Empire of Wealth*, 363-67, for an appraisal of the GI Bill’s very positive, but unintended consequences.

²³Greenberg, “The GI Bill of Rights,” 3.

As veterans returned from overseas, they found many homes in Depression-condition, and years of war induced neglect weighed heavily even on well-conditioned houses. The second benefit of the GI Bill of Right addressed this issue by giving veterans the opportunity to assume government guaranteed home (VA) loans. According to Greenberg, “By the end of 1947, the Veterans Administration guaranteed well over one million home, business, and farm loans [and] . . . housing starts jumped from 114,000 in 1944 to 1.7 million by 1950.”²⁴ With the seal of government safety atop the loans,

This [guarantee] encouraged developers to build, bankers to lend, and veterans to buy often with no down payment. The resulting explosion in consumer demand stirred the spirit of American manufacturers, entrepreneurs, and local officials who built new roads, schools, churches, and shopping centers.²⁵

As veterans purchased slices of their communities, they began to own (and invest) in property like no generation before. With this stream of new homes came new products to fill them; producers worked to create new goods and recreate old goods both to satisfy consumer appetites and to cause hunger for more.²⁶ Mary Ann Watson summarizes well the years immediately following the war:

Within a year of the war’s end, twelve million GIs were back home ready to make up for lost time—building and buying and making babies at a dizzying rate. As the country boomed in postwar prosperity, an abundant home life became part of a new nationalism. All the marvels arrived as predicted and changed not only the physical landscape of the country and household, but the social and psychological contours

²⁴Ibid., 4.

²⁵Ibid.

²⁶“Buying homes, particularly new ones, motivated consumers to purchase things to put in them, and thereby helped stoke the crucial consumer durables market. Billions of dollars were transacted in the sale of household appliances and furnishings, as refrigerators, washing machines, televisions, and the light became standard features in postwar American homes.” Lizabeth Cohen, *A Consumers’ Republic: The Politics of Mass Consumption and Postwar America* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2003), 123. See also, Greenberg, “The GI Bill of Rights,” 4.

as well.²⁷

Within the business sector, these contours were especially acute. Seismic shifts of various types were radically reshaping the context in which Americans worked.

According to Thomas McCraw,

The war gave a profound jolt to American society in general, and therefore to business across all industries. About half-dozen of these changes were momentous: the movement of masses of women into jobs outside the home; the conditioning of millions of people to a work life in big organizations, be they corporate or military; the creation of large populations on the West Coast and in the Sunbelt; this moving out of the business cycle; the introduction of mass income taxation in the withholding tax system; and, perhaps most important of all, the start of a long stretch of economic prosperity. The period from the early 1940s to the early 1970s became a kind of golden age for American business.²⁸

The growth of the economy was not without negative implications. The mindset of government lending, stemming back to a strong embrace of Keynesianism, ushered in a new familiarity with, comfort in, and reliance upon consumer credit. As Lizabeth Cohen explains in her book *A Consumers' Republic*,

More than anything else, the explosion of consumer credit and borrowing kept the postwar mass consumption economy afloat. Mortgage debt, fueled by VA and FHA lending, expanded along with homeownership, but so too did other forms of credit and borrowing. The value of total consumer credit grew almost elevenfold between 1945 and 1960, and installment credit—the major component of the total by the postwar era—jumped a stunning nineteenfold.²⁹

²⁷Mary Ann Watson, *Defining Visions: Television and the American Experience in the 20th Century*, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Blackwell, 2008), 7.

²⁸McCraw, *American Business since 1920*, 62.

²⁹Cohen, *A Consumers' Republic*, 123. Cohen provides sobering commentary on the expansive nature of credit within the American economy: “Another major contributor to the explosion of consumer credit in the postwar era was the expansion of credit cards from the limited number of retail store and gasoline company charge cards available before the war to their much greater use, and in particular the development of third-party universal credit cards. First to appear was Diners Club in 1949, the success of which inspired American Express, Hilton Hotels, Bank of America, and Chase Manhattan Bank to mount competitors in 1958. Many others would follow, all putting more and more credit at the disposal of consumers. ‘The democratization of credit was proceeding at a gallop,’ is how one historian of finance describes the atmosphere of the era. And a 1959 Department of Labor study, *How American Buying Habits Change*, confirmed that ordinary workers had radically changed their mode of financing by the 1950s, from

Reflecting the mindset and worldview of the era, church congregations drank deeply of consumerism. All manner of church-related products, including hymnals, choir robes, organs, offering envelopes for systematic giving, attendance recording resources, and other products emerged, all touted to beautify and enhance efficiency and quality of churches.³⁰ James Hudnut-Beumler explains some of the implications of this cultural embrace within his book *In Pursuit of the Almighty's Dollar*:

All of these [products] made the local church a consumer where heretofore congregations had been local producers of most of the items they needed. This subtle shift meant two things for the future of congregational enterprise. The first was those churches that did not buy the paraphernalia of the church market often were felt by their pastors and members to be missing the trappings (or even requirements) of more successful churches. What could be more obviously faithful in Victorian America, after all, than a church striving to keep up with the challenge of its age? The second implication was that congregations became permanent consumers, and thus the cost of being a congregation, reflected in the cost of maintaining a customary local church lifestyle was permanently raised to a new base.³¹

This consumption was not limited to ministry accoutrements. Following the war, church congregations and membership increased in number, and subsequently new church buildings swelled to meet consumer demand.³² “Church construction rose from

striving to save to incurring substantial debt. A year earlier, in fact, the National Retail Credit Association had announced that whereas in the heart of the depression in 1935, 35% of the 70,000 personal bankruptcies were by wage earners, now 85% of an 80,000 total were. Not surprisingly, by 1957, two-thirds of American families carried some kind of debt, about half of all families owning from installment buying. Without a doubt, credit became an admission ticket that granted purchasers as citizens full entry into postwar mass consumption of prosperity—and retailers and third-party lenders additional profits.” Ibid., 124.

³⁰James Hudnut-Beumler, *In Pursuit of The Almighty's Dollar: A History of Money and American Protestantism* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2007), 141.

³¹Ibid., 33-34.

³²In the ten years between 1945 and 1955, church membership increase by 30 million, rising from 70 million to around 100 million Americans. Reeves, *Twentieth-Century America*, 158; Justo Gonzalez, *The Story of Christianity*, vol. 2, *The Reformation to the Present Day* (New York: Harper Collins, 1985), 380.

\$76 million in 1946 to \$409 million in 1950, to more than \$1 billion by the end of the decade,” according to Thomas Reeves.³³

The flood of new products, goods, and buildings (secular and sacred) signaled a shift within post-war America. Faced with a myriad of options, Americans found themselves choosing from not one, but many types of many things. For those of the war generation, choices were something new in many regards, but they soon acquiesced to the world of choices. The ensuing baby boom generation followed suit, as have generations after them; choice is now normative.³⁴

Among the new choices afforded were more related to church. As time progressed, churchgoers wanted and expected more options. The United States was undergoing a conversion: “A culture focused on survival goals” was dissipating, being replaced with “a consumer-driven culture that overflows with choices [offering] worship communities a range of choices.”³⁵ Schaller illuminates one of the results:

It should not be surprising that people who have grown up in a consumer-driven church that is organized to expand the range of available choices expect to be offered attractive choices in the day, time, hour, physical setting, format, music, and level of expected active participation when Christians gather for the corporate worship of God.³⁶

The connection between consumerism and the multi-site church concept is significant and simple. Offering options is one of the core attributes that multi-site churches and their leaders esteem most about their church model. Multi-site churches

³³Reeves, *Twentieth-Century America*, 158.

³⁴Lyle E. Schaller, *The Seven-Day-A-Week Church* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1992), 74.

³⁵Lyle E. Schaller, *Discontinuity and Hope: Radical Change and the Path to the Future* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1999), 138.

³⁶*Ibid.*

give individuals the choice of worship gathering locations, times, styles, and preaching methods in order to reach non-believers and congregationalize new members.

Regardless of a church's intention for being multi-site, catering to the desires, preferences, and "choice" of consumers is central to the multi-site mechanism. Lyle Schaller makes the multi-site/consumerism connection well in his book *Discontinuity and Hope*. In narrative fashion, he demonstrates why organizations began choosing to operate in multiple, rather than a single location.

That's the First National Bank at the corner of Main and Washington, and directly across from it is First Church, where we've been members ever since we moved here 30 years ago. The college is four blocks to the east up on the hill, our hospital is about a half mile to the west, and our doctor has his office in that building over there," explained a longtime resident in 1965 while showing an old friend around town.

Today's resident takes a visiting friend on a brief visit to the same part of town and explains, "That's the First National Bank, but I haven't been there for years. We do all our banking at a branch in the supermarket where we buy groceries. We're members of First Church, but we go to their east side campus, which is within walking distance of our house. We have one congregation, one staff, one budget, and one treasury, but three meeting places—a small one on the north side of town, the big one now where we live, and the old building downtown here. The old college up on the hill is now University. This is their main campus, but they also offer classes at three other locations. We're members of the HMO that has doctors in five locations, but my primary care is in a branch about a mile from where we live. Her office is next to a branch of the main hospital, so I've never been in the main hospital except to visit a couple friends

As recently as the 1960s and 1970s, institutions expected their constituents to come to them. The location of the buildings that housed institutions also defined the urban landscape. In today's consumer-driven society, however, hospitals, lawyers, physicians, banks, and colleges now advertise for customers. The competition among various institutions to reach new generations has forced them to be more "customer-friendly."

One highly visible example of that is branch banking. In 1971, only 55 supermarkets housed a full-service branch of the bank. Fourteen years later, that number had increased to only 210, but by 1997, 4,400 supermarkets included a full-service branch bank.³⁷

³⁷Schaller, *Discontinuity and Hope*, 174-75.

Schaller brings to light several important insights. First, he notes organizations began to transition somewhere in the 1960s and 1970s from expecting customers to come to them to expecting that their organization would go to the customer. Second, Schaller presents a systemic shift in this shift in this reality. It was not one aspect of the organizational world that was becoming multilocal; the bulk of the structure was changing from one site to many sites. Third, Schaller cites the progressive nature of multi-site organizational expression. While he mentions only branch banking as an example, this case is representative of the larger social overtones.³⁸ As consumerism took hold within the nation, the economic philosophy started slowly and then gradually accelerated. Fourth, and perhaps most noteworthy, the transition from being one site to becoming multiple site organizations hinged on satiating consumers.

Based on Schaller's rationale, is it possible that the multi-site church concept emerged from the business world? For example, when juxtaposing the multi-site church definition against that of a branch bank or branch store, there seems to be strong resemblance. Within a "branch store" arrangement, "Usually, one store in a market area is designated the main store, while the others are designated as branches: but where a company operates several . . . stores in a single market, the distinction between 'main'

³⁸Others make similar connections between the branch banking idea and multi-site or satellite churches. See Dave Ferguson, "The Multi-Site Church: Some of the Strengths of this New Life Form," *Christianity Today* (2003) [on-line]; accessed 16 April 2006; available from www.christianitytoday.com/global/printer.html?bcl/areas/vision-strategy/articles/1e-2003-002.81.html; Internet. See McIntosh's satellite model description: "The satellite model is best compared to a bank that has numerous branches located in different cities. Each branch operates with some level of independence but remains corporately linked to the mother bank. Each bank enhances the others by offering services that can be accessed by more people living in different parts of the city. Each branch expands the job market by providing more opportunities for people to work. Each branch provides a measure of accountability to the others as they compare the number of transactions rendered and people served. It is one bank but in many locations. The satellite model is one church but in different locations." Gary L. McIntosh, *Make Room for the Boom . . . or Bust: Six Models for Reaching Three Generations* (Grand Rapids: Fleming H. Revel, 1997), 137-38.

and ‘branch’ becomes meaningless.”³⁹ In comparing the two definitions, the relationship of branch stores correlates closely with the mutuality between locations of a multi-site church. It is also interesting that this above definition is from the 1980s, some twenty years before the multi-site church concept began to enlarge rapidly.

Others make even stronger connections between the multi-site church concept and the business world. In *The Multi-site Revolution*, Surratt, Ligon, and Bird, in less than a page of discussion compare the multi-site church concept to franchising concepts launched in the 1950s, including Holiday Inn, Burger King, Shoney’s, and McDonald’s. Using the trend of franchising for validation, the authors say, “Multi-site extensions of trusted-name churches are something that connect well with our times.”⁴⁰

Whether or not one deems it acceptable for a new church model to emerge from a secular business model, it could be that the multi-site church concept is simply a sacred crossover of a twentieth-century marketplace phenomenon.⁴¹ Thomas McCraw details the rise of the franchise concept within the United States:

Rainer makes this connection as early as 1993. See Thom S. Rainer, *The Book of Church Growth* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1993), 211.

³⁹David M. Brownstone, Irene M. Frank, and Gorton Carruth, *The VNR Dictionary of Business and Finance* (New York: Van Nostrand Reinhold Company, 1980), 34.

⁴⁰Surratt, Ligon, and Bird, *The Multi-Site Church Revolution*, 9-10. Consider also, Douglas B. Sosnick, Matthew J. Dowd, and Ron Fournier, *Applebee’s America: How Successful Political, Business, and Religious Leaders Connect with the New American Community* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2006), 100. See also, Carl F. George, *Prepare Your Church for the Future* (Grand Rapids: Fleming H. Revell, 1991), 22-23. George does not refer specifically to multi-site churches, but his assertion about a small-group-ministry “franchise” as a mechanism to reach cities is apropos here.

⁴¹For further discussion on this particular concept and perspectives on the broader implications of consumerism’s effect on the church, see Thomas White and John M. Yeats, *Franchising McChurch: Feeding on Obsession with Easy Christianity* (Colorado Springs, CO: David C. Cook, 2009); John Drane, *The McDonaldization of the Church: Consumer Culture and the Church’s Future* (Macon, GA: Smyth & Helwys, 2001); and John Drane, *After McDonaldization: Mission, Ministry, and Christian Discipleship in an Age of Uncertainty* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2008).

Franchising as a business method was not entirely new. It had originated in the middle decades of the 19th century, when companies such as McCormick reaper and Singer sewing machines set up franchised outlets to sell their products and show buyers how to use them. These outlets also helped with consumer financing and offered after-sale repair services. Similar reasons prompted the rise of automobile franchises in the early 1900s.

In the years after World War II, a very different kind of franchising sprang up, one organized around service industries rather than cars and other big-ticket items. This “business-format” franchising brought a new, wholly standardized system of retail trade. Using identical formats nationwide, small service firms such as restaurants and dry cleaners could now realize advantages previously available only to big businesses. These included quality discounts in supplies, access to proven business methods, and—most important—a nationally recognized brand. By the 1960s, franchised outlets had popped up for convenience stores, motels, dry cleaners, and especially for fast-food restaurants.

As American society became increasingly mobile during the postwar decades, franchising grew more rapidly than did any other type of business.⁴²

The “business-format” franchising model actually began in the 1890s when Martha Mathilda Harper initiated a network of “Harper Beauty Shops.” By the 1920s, Harper developed a franchise empire of over 500 stores in North America and Europe.⁴³ As Blair and Lafontaine explain, however, it would take more time for business-format franchising to imbed within the economic framework of America:

Mathilda Harper unfortunately did not leave a lasting mark on franchising. Other firms, such as the supermarket chain Piggly Wiggly, Hertz Car Rentals, IGA (Independent Grocers Association), A&W Restaurants, Ben Franklin Retailers, Maid Rite (a hamburger chain restaurant), and Terminix Termite and Pest Control all started franchising in the 1920s and are still franchising today. According to the French Franchise Federation, Jean Prouvost, owner of the *Lainiere de Roubais*, launched his network of Pingouin also in the 1920s, thereby initiating the concept of franchise distribution in France. These early entrants were followed in the 1930s by companies like Howard Johnson restaurants, Stewart’s Drive-In, Arthur Murray

⁴²McCraw, *American Business since 1920*, 129-30. Harry Kursh provides a helpful, first-hand, and more expansive discussion on the growth and development of American franchising in his chapter entitled “Franchising Comes of Age.” Harry Kursh, *The Franchise Boom*, rev. ed. (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1969), 1-19.

⁴³Roger D. Blair and Francine Lafontaine, *The Economics of Franchising* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 6-7. For a more detailed, yet concise history of early American franchising, see Stan Luxenberg, *Roadside Empires: How the Chains Franchised America* (New York: Penguin, 1985), 13-30.

Schools of Dancing, and Culligan in the U.S., and by the Canadian Tire retail chain and its Associate Store program, Merle Norman Cosmetics, and the Le Groupe ROMA among others in Canada. But it was not until the 1950s, with the advent of chains such as Burger King and McDonald's, and the economic boom of the post-World War two era, that business-format franchising fully came into its own in the United States and Canada, and, even more recently, throughout much of the rest of the world.⁴⁴

Central to this new brand of franchising is the concept of “place-product-packaging.” Traditional franchising calls for a franchisee to merely sell the product of the franchiser according to minimalistic guidelines of presentation and service. Conversely, business-format franchising is far more holistic. Within this arrangement, a franchisee sells the franchiser's product (consistent with the traditional franchise model) in addition to “a distinctive business strategy that embraces accounting, management, quality control, training, and/or advertising functions.”⁴⁵ Thus, within a business-format franchising model, both the franchisee and franchisor commonly share “readily identifiable logos, color schemes, building designs, and service and product mixes so that each unit in a retail system would reinforce the others,”⁴⁶ and as Jakle et al, point out, “[this] makes the whole greater than the sum of the parts.”⁴⁷

It does not take much imagination to see the similarities between the business-format franchise and the multi-site church. In fact, in their book, *Spin-Off Churches*, Harrison, Cheyney, and Overstreet make this very comparison, labeling one form of

⁴⁴Blair and Lafontaine, *The Economics of Franchising*, 7; see also, Godfrey M. Lebar, *Chain Stores In America: 1859-1950* (New York: Chain Store Publishing, 1952), 6. Stan Luxenberg reasons similarly. Luxenberg, *Roadside Empires*, 5, 8.

⁴⁵John A. Jakle, Keith A. Sculle, and Jefferson S. Rogers, *The Motel in America* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996), 152.

⁴⁶Ibid., 120.

⁴⁷Ibid.

doing multi-site as “the franchisee model.”⁴⁸ While Harrison, Cheyney, and Overstreet, frame only one form of multi-site as a franchise model, the reality is that every variation of the multi-site church model demonstrates franchise attributes.⁴⁹ Granted, franchisee licensing may not be involved, nor are multi-site satellites generally set up according to hierarchical systems where one church is the franchiser and the other a franchisee.

Nevertheless, in the areas of shared branding, accounting, quality controls, management, training, product, and services, multi-site arrangements display an astounding likeness to business-format franchises.⁵⁰

In summary, the role of economic advancement was crucial in the development of multi-site churches. The wake of World War II caused major shifts across the social and economic landscape of the United States. The amalgam of Keynesian economics,

⁴⁸Their definition is as follows: “The Franchisee approach: As much as is possible, these new worship communities are ‘cloned.’ There is a ‘branding’ element in this approach, where the sermon, songs, and other aspects of the worship service are generally copied from the mother or originating church. These often take on the flavor of a company-owned franchise.” Rodney Harrison, Tom Cheyney, and Don Overstreet, *Spin-Off Churches: How One Church Successfully Plants Another* (Nashville: B&H, 2008), 77.

⁴⁹See Bob Smietana, “High-Tech Circuit Riders: Satellite Churches are Discovering a New Way to Grow the Body of Christ,” *Christianity Today*, 31 August 2005, 60.

⁵⁰Paul Rand Nixon, chairman of the Federal Trade Commission (1965), offered a clear example of the broadening definition of franchising during the 1960s era when attempting to define the concept before a U.S. Senate subcommittee meeting on antitrust and monopoly. Nixon stated, “Historically, franchising has referred to contractual relations between producers and distributors setting forth the terms of their relationships in the marketing of products. As one writer has defined it, the franchise was a ‘system under which a manufacturer granted to certain dealers the right to sell his product or service, and generally defined areas, in exchange for a promise to promote and merchandise the product in a specific manner.’ In recent years, as franchised selling has evolved and encompassed a wider section of the economy, the definition has been broadened to include ‘any contract under which independent retailers or wholesalers are organized to act in concert with each other or with manufacturers to distribute given products or services.’ The so-called franchise boom is a relatively recent development on the American economic scene . . . and . . . the many varieties of franchise systems differ among themselves so widely that any attempt to state application rules to all such systems must either be so broad as to approach the meaningless or [be] tailored with numerous qualifications in order to fit all varieties of franchises.” *Hearings*, U.S. Senate, Subcommittee on Antitrust and Monopoly, 88th Cong., 2nd sess., Mar. 2, 3, and 4, 1965: 78, 81. Kursh documents several attempts to define franchising during the 1960s. Each presentation demonstrates a quickening shift in understanding the meaning of the franchise concept. Kursh, *The Franchise Boom*, 21-24.

fear of continued depression, and confidence brought on by a global victory, among other variables, morphed American society from a survival-focused into a consumer-focused nation. Aided by legislation like the 1944 GI Bill of Rights, the United States entered a time of prosperity after the war that rivaled the 1920s, but with a far longer duration.⁵¹ With a better educated populous who quickly discovered their new power to purchase goods and services, organizations both social and business alike focused increasingly on providing more and more choices for the American consumer. New businesses emerged in the 1950s and burgeoned for the rest of the century. These organizations fully embraced the ideology that in order to sell wares to customers, a business must go to them in the name of better “customer service.”

In small ways, churches followed a similar pattern, building buildings and providing goods in order to give more choices to consumers both in and out of the church. In time, however, an increasing number of churches took note of business trends and began to emulate the success of the marketplace.⁵² As the business-format franchise approach appeared and met increasing success, several church innovators embraced aspects of the multiple site business frameworks. At first, multi-site churches appeared as anomalies. Since the turn of the twenty-first century, however, multi-site churches are becoming more of a normality.⁵³

⁵¹Jones, *The Consumer Society*, 333.

⁵²Schaller concisely explains, “This concept of multiple sites for department stores, financial institutions, universities, public libraries, theological schools, medical clinics, law firms, and hospitals surfaced during the 1950s but did not become popular until the 1960s. Thirty years later [1990s] a small but growing number of Protestant congregations have accepted a role as a multisite church. Schaller, *Discontinuity and Hope*, 7-8.

⁵³Warren Bird and Kristin Walters, “Multisite is Multiplying: Survey Identifies Leading Practices and Confirms New Developments in the Movement’s Expansion,” Leadership Network (Dallas),

Factor 2: Accelerated Mobility

Understandably, the connection between national economic advancement and the development of multi-site churches is complex and nuanced. The connection between multi-site and America's growing mobility is not, however. Before World War II, Americans' prospects of moving from place to place were limited. Generally, travel presented challenges, even when distances were short. When distances increased, travel difficulty and limitations usually increased as well. Even though Americans utilized trains, automobiles, ships, and even airplanes for transport before the war, these amenities were a luxury. Mechanized transport carried sizeable costs in terms of finance and time.

As troops returned home from the war, distance—once an immense barrier to movement—became far less daunting psychologically. Troops, having traversed the globe by plane, ship, and truck saw distance from a new perspective. Treks between states and even coast to coast were relatively small compared to journeys across the seas.

Even for Americans who never ventured beyond the boundaries of the continental United States, perceptions about distance and travel were on the cusp of a dramatic transformation in both a tangible and psychological sense. Two mobility enhancements would completely alter the commercial, physical, and social panorama of post World War II America: the automobile and the interstate highway system.

Karl Benz patented the four-stroke gasoline engine in Germany in the year 1885. Seventeen years later (1901), Ransom Olds developed the first production line automobile (Oldsmobile), and by 1914, Henry Ford had begun the mass production of the

2 September 2010, 3 [on-line]; accessed 4 September 2010; available from http://leadnet.org/resources/download/multisite_is_multiplying_new_developments_in_the_movements_expansion/; Internet. See also, Geoff Surratt, Greg Ligon, and Warren Bird, *A Multi-site Roadtrip: Exploring the New Normal* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2009).

Model-T.⁵⁴ While an auspicious future awaited the automobile, until the 1920s this novel form of carry remained out of most Americans' reach. Just as this invention was poised to become a widespread, affordable commodity to the masses, the Wall Street crash of October 1929 and the Great Depression to follow slowed the auto's production and progress. During World War II, vehicle production picked up speed as manufacturers produced jeeps, tanks, and trucks to supply war efforts. After war demands waned, as outlined above, production shifted from war goods to consumer goods, and the automobile was at the center of American consumption. Cohen verifies, "Automobile sales boomed . . . with new-car sales quadrupling between 1946 and 1955, until three-quarters of American households owned at least one car by the end of the 1950s."⁵⁵

With automobiles came a new sense of freedom and a host of new choices. In some ways, the automobile was the embodiment of the consumer ethos. James Dunn expounds on this idea:

Ownership of an automobile empowers an individual to make a vastly wider range of choices relating to personal mobility than he or she would have without a car. Auto drivers are freed from the constraints of the fixed routes and rigid schedules of train or bus riders. They can choose many more destinations; select the companions, if any, traveling in their vehicle; carry much more luggage than they could on a bus; never have to stand because all the seats are taken; stop for refreshment when they want to; listen to their favorite music or news; and not worry (too much) about being mugged while waiting at the bus stop or subway station.⁵⁶

⁵⁴Dennis Adler, *Daimler & Benz: The Complete History, The Birth and Evolution of the Mercedes-Benz* (San Francisco: HarperCollins, 2006), 3; George Constable and Bob Somerville, *A Century of Innovation: Twenty Engineering Achievements that Transformed Our Lives* (Washington, DC: Joseph Henry Press, 2003), 22; and Erik Eckermann, *World History of the Automobile* (Warrendale, PA: SAE, 2001), 54.

⁵⁵Cohen, *A Consumers' Republic*, 123.

⁵⁶James A. Dunn, Jr., *Driving Forces: The Automobile, Its Enemies, and the Politics of Mobility* (Washington, DC: Brookings Institution Press, 1998), 2.

With their newfound mobility in the postwar decade, Americans embraced travel as a way of life. The automobile gave family breadwinners the ability to live further away from work. As baby boom families sought new places to accommodate their expansion, outlying areas (what became the suburbs, once out of reach due to distance) suddenly became financially attainable and reasonably reachable with a daily commute.⁵⁷ The suburbs began to flourish, and the urban cities and their amenities began to fan out.⁵⁸ Families migrated away from the city core with a decentralizing effect in what Patrick Allitt labels “the mass suburbanization of America.”⁵⁹

While the automobile was critical to moving America into suburbanization, more was necessary to transition the masses away from the urban core. Suburbanization necessitated a binary catalyst in mobility. Cars were the mobilizing mechanism, but the suburbanization process required a mobilizing conduit. That conduit came with the interstate highway system ratified by the Federal Highway Act of 1956.

Signed into law by Dwight D. Eisenhower, the Federal Highway Act authorized the construction of 41,000 miles of the current interstate highway system.⁶⁰ Eisenhower and other military strategists believed strongly in the necessity of a national transportation infrastructure, modeled in principle after Germany’s autobahn, to bolster the nation’s defenses and security. While the project undoubtedly aided in national

⁵⁷Towns, Wagner, and Rainer, *The Everychurch Guide to Growth*, 128-29.

⁵⁸Watson, *Defining Visions*, 7.

⁵⁹Patrick Allitt, *Religion in America since 1945* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2003), 33-34.

⁶⁰Schaller, *Discontinuity & Hope*, 77.

defense, Eisenhower's countrywide transportation network had far broader implications, as John Wukovits reveals:

[This] elaborate network of concrete connected all sectors of the nation, sparked increased travel, and spurred the growth of [business]. It is hard to think of a person who has not been affected by this underappreciated accomplishment: Eisenhower's plan made possible a quantum leap in the movement of people and products around the United States.⁶¹

Eisenhower's quantum leap of movement was no less significant in church life. The automobile and the highway system, as Elmer Towns articulates, have negated the distance issue when it comes to a single church evangelizing an entire city.⁶² Indeed, megachurches and multi-site churches now possess the opportunity to envelope an entire city with little concern about distance and travel. A multi-site church, specifically, can gather its campus congregations, bring its pastoral teams together, and even migrate a senior pastor from campus to campus on a Sunday morning all with relative travel ease.

Minimization of distance and travel remains important to many aspects of the multi-site church. In the early development stages of the multi-site concept, accelerated mobility was critical. The origination and growth of early multi-site churches such as Perimeter Church, Atlanta, Georgia, and Mount Paran Church of God, Atlanta, Georgia, would not have been possible without the automobile and the national highway system tandem. Even today, most multi-site churches still rely heavily upon both. What may be the greatest contribution of the mobility accelerants is that by way of these tools multi-site churches possess a heightened potential to take church to more people more rapidly

⁶¹John Wukovits, *Eisenhower* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), 176.

⁶²Elmer Towns, *Is the Day of the Denomination Dead?* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1973), 136.

over a larger geographic area than a typical single-site church.

Factor 3: Technological Innovation

In 1990, Elmer Towns cited the “computerized television screen” as one of two primary factors catalyzing the growth of innovative churches in post World War II society.⁶³ In 2006, Surratt, Ligon, and Bird acclaimed the growth of digital technologies as one of several key impetuses instrumental to beginning the multi-site church movement.⁶⁴ While multi-site churches would likely have originated based on the economic and mobility factors discussed above, multi-site churches would have been far fewer in number and far more limited in scope without rapid technological advancement. Without the momentum of the Third Industrial Revolution following World War II and the digital revolution inaugurated in 1995 by the introduction of the commercialized Internet, the “multi-site revolution” would still be a distant idea for the future.⁶⁵

To become a movement, the multi-site church concept needed something more than physical mobility to advance and enlarge it. It needed much greater connectivity on a variety of levels in order to propel the multi-site church idea to a movement. It required increasingly stronger interplay and interaction between church members, multi-site

⁶³Towns, *10 of Today's Most Innovative Churches*, 204.

⁶⁴Surratt, Ligon, and Bird, *The Multi-Site Church Revolution*, 91-92.

⁶⁵McCraw explains the scope of the Third Industrial Revolution: “In its effect on American business as in many other ways, World War II was the most significant event of the 20th century. Its ramifications were almost endless. Because of the pressing need to develop high tech weapons, and also to deal with the heavy toll of casualties and sickness, the war either created or gave new momentum to industries that would become the most important of the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries. These industries were so different in nature from those of the Second Industrial Revolution (steel, automobiles, and a electric equipment) that they formed the core of a Third Industrial Revolution, rooted in scientific research and based more on knowledge work than on mechanized mass production. The new industries included advanced telecommunications and electronics (including primitive computers), aviation

campuses, teams of multi-site leaders, multi-site concept innovators and future implementers, multi-site practioners and strategists, and a host of other individuals and entities involved with multi-site thinking and applications. The concept needed a medium for expansion, and that medium came through the combined technological advancements of television, satellite communications, and the Internet. Space does not allow for a detailed treatment of these advancements, but a cursory look at their combined impact is mandatory for understanding the growth of the multi-site church concept.⁶⁶

Like the automobile, the dawn of television came before World War II, but its wide scale availability and adoption could only commence after the war. Mary Ann Watson explains the situation.

Before the attack on Pearl Harbor, television was a curio for the wealthy. Only several thousand sets were sold. Then, for all practical purposes, World War II halted television's expansion. The raw materials needed to manufacture TV receivers and transmitters, like aluminum, cobalt, and copper, were instead put to military use. Station construction was also halted. Most Americans were unaware that a skeleton schedule of TV programs was even being offered at the fledgling medium.⁶⁷

and aerospace, atomic energy, synthetic chemicals and pharmaceuticals, and highly sophisticated medical devices." McCraw, *American Business since 1920*, 62.

⁶⁶Clearly, numerous other advancements could be included in the technological innovation category. Some of these include, Xerox's fax machine (1966); Motorola's first call with a cell phone (1973); the Apple II, Apple's first mass-produced commercially personal computer (1977); Compaq's release of the first mobile computer (1983); Apple's Macintosh public introduction with point and click technology (1984); the Federal Communication Commission's intervention to ensure growth and competition within cell phone markets (1993). Sosnick, Dowd, Fournier, *Applebee's America*, 233-39. These subjects, and many others, remain untreated in this section in order to highlight briefly macro communication innovations germane to multi-site church development.

⁶⁷Watson, *Defining Visions*, 14; see also Edgerton, *The Columbia History of American Television*, 78.

Following the war, though, the spread of television expanded at a blistering rate. Gary Edgerton provides an enlightening graphic documenting the numeric growth of television and the television stations between the years 1946 and 1955 (Table 1).⁶⁸

Table 1. Numeric increase of television sets and televisions stations in United States households between 1946-1955

Year	Number of TVs in the U.S.	Percentage of households with TVs	Number of TV stations
1946	20,000	0.02	6 in four cities
1947	44,000	0.04	18 in 11 cities
1948	350,000	0.66	30 in 29 cities
1949	1 million	2.0	69 in 57 cities
1950	3.9 million	8.1	104 in 65 cities
1951	10.3 million	21.5	107 in 65 cities
1952	15.3 million	32.0	108 in 65 cities
1953	20.4 million	42.5	198 in 241 cities
1954	28.5 million	59.4	380 (not available)
1955	30.5 million	64.0	458 (not available)

As the growth of television increased, its influence on American culture became increasingly pervasive. Watson offers an incisive appraisal of this concern:

By mid century [the television] was becoming central to modern life in the United States. Soon it would be the common reference point, a palpable force in creating a national consensus on what was important. In the postwar decades, so momentous in the life of the nation, television defined what mattered most—setting our country’s agenda for debate and action, giving us our myths and stories.⁶⁹

As the century progressed, television germinated rapidly, and innovation upon innovation furthered television’s domain. One significant step forward came with the

⁶⁸Edgerton, *The Columbia History of American Television*, 103.

⁶⁹Watson, *Defining Visions*, 7.

application of satellite communication technology in the private sector. In 1962, the Telstar communications went into orbit, and a year later provided the transmission of president John F. Kennedy's funeral to a global audience. In one broadcast, globalization and communication took a giant leap forward. As Francis Cairncross recounts, "The psychological impact [of Kennedy's funeral] was huge: the unprecedented new link among countries would change perceptions of the world, creating the sense that the world's peoples belong to a global, not merely local or national, community."⁷⁰

From household to household in America, micro innovations also took hold. During the 1980s, time-shifting appeared with the introduction of the video cassette recorders (VCRs).⁷¹ Between 1980 and 1985, the percentage of American households with VCRs grew from 1.1 percent to 20.8 percent. By 1991, the number elevated to 71.9 percent.⁷² Though minor compared to the launch of a satellite into space, the impact of the VCR was no less significant. With this small tool, Americans found the ability to control individually how and when television and video could be viewed. The perceptual distance between live events and recordings blurred to a degree, and the power of choice advanced further. For the multi-site churches, especially those using video recordings for worship services, this innovation would have major ramifications.

As television continued to grow in influence throughout the latter half of the twentieth century, another innovation was on the horizon. Unlike preceding mass communication advancements like the television, telephone, and radio, this singular

⁷⁰Francis Cairncross, *The Death of Distance: How the Communications Revolution Will Change Our Lives* (Boston: Harvard Business School Press, 1997), 7-8.

⁷¹Edgerton, *The Columbia History of American Television*, 314.

⁷²Ibid.

innovation would integrate communication like no other technology before it, becoming, “An open conduit . . . capable of transmitting anything that can be put into digital form.”⁷³ The innovation was the Internet.

The Internet, first dubbed the ARPANET (Advanced Research Projects Agency Network), began through the collaborative work of Massachusetts Institute of Technology researchers and the Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency (DARPA) in the mid 1960s.⁷⁴ Between its initiation and the 1990s, the Internet remained within military and academia environs, performing primarily as a research tool. As late as 1993, even “to a knowledgeable insider,” as Shane Greenstein explains, “the Internet was still progressing, but it received no attention outside a small technically oriented community.”⁷⁵

On December 15, 1994, Netscape Communications Corporation introduced its full Internet graphical browser (Netscape Navigator 1.0) and made the product available cost free to any non-commercial users. In the few months before and after Netscape’s public stock offering on August 9, 1995, the Cable era converted to the Digital era as the Internet boom commenced.⁷⁶ According to Wheeler, Auyama, and Warf, “By 1996, fewer than 40 million people were connected to the Internet; by 1997, the figure has risen

⁷³Cairncross, *The Death of Distance*, 89.

⁷⁴Paul E. Ceruzzi, “The Internet before Commercialization,” in *The Internet and American Business*, ed. William Aspray and Paul E. Ceruzzi (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2008), 10.

⁷⁵Shane Greenstein, “Innovation and Evolution of Market Structure for Internet Access in the United States,” in *The Internet and American Business*, ed. William Aspray and Paul E. Ceruzzi (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2008), 54.

⁷⁶Greenstein, “Innovation and Evolution,” 55; Edgerton, *The Columbia History of American Television*, 350.

to more than 100 million. In 1998, the vol. of traffic on the Internet doubled every three months.”⁷⁷ Giving perspective on its growth, Edgerton describes the Internet explosion vis-à-vis similar communications advancements.

From [Navigator 1.0’s introduction forward], the Internet grew faster than any other communication medium in human history. As a comparison, radio took 50 years to be adopted by 50 million American households; television took 20 years; the personal computer, 15 years; and the Internet, four years. By 1998, there were 175 million Internet hosts (networked computers) worldwide, and . . . by September 11, 2001, this number had risen to 430 million hosts.⁷⁸

The expansion of technological innovations since the end of World War II is difficult to comprehend. When the world conflict ended, most homes did not have a television. Presently, televisions are nearly ubiquitous in American households. Similarly, at their beginning computers were used by only research institutions and the government. Now computers (at home, work, school, and church) are following an even more accelerated and expanded path of universal adoption and integration. Unlike the visual and visible innovation of television, computers span the gamut of application well beyond mere image reproduction.⁷⁹ Presently, computers touch nearly every facet of an

⁷⁷James O. Wheeler, Yuko Auyama, and Barney Warf, “Introduction: City Space, Industrial Space, and Cyberspace,” in *Cities in the Telecommunications Age: The Fracturing of Geographies*, ed. James O. Wheeler, Yuko Aoyama, and Barney Warf (New York: Routledge, 2000), 3.

⁷⁸Edgerton, *The Columbia History of American Television*, 411. It is interesting to juxtapose the Internet’s numeric emanation with Dave Ferguson’s description of the multi-site church concept’s expansion. Ferguson argues that in 1990, there were “fewer than 10 multi-site churches,” in 2000, there “were fewer than 100 multisite churches,” and by 2004, there were “1,500 multisite churches.” Dave Ferguson, “Multisite Churches,” (paper presented at the annual meeting of the American Society of Church Growth, Fuller Theological Seminary, Pasadena, CA, November 4, 2004). If these figures are accurate, a correlation is evident between the multi-site church concept and the Internet’s proliferation.

⁷⁹For perspective, consider the expansion of digital technologies between 2000 and 2010 as chronicled by Nayeli Rodriguez. According to Rodriguez, within a decade (1) active blogs increased from 12,000 to 141 million; (2) daily Google searches increased from 100 million to 2010 billion; (3) daily emails increased from 12 billion to 247 billion; (4) yearly text messages increased from 400,000 to 4.5 billion; (5) time spent online increased from 2.7 hours per week to 18 hours per week; and (6) yearly iTunes downloads increased from 0 to 10 billion. Nayeli Rodriguez, “Back Story: How the Digital Revolution Changed Our World,” *Newsweek*, 26 July 2010. In light of this information, consider how

American's life.⁸⁰

Church life is no exception. The multi-site church concept is possible, in large part, because of the American church's embrace of the television and the computer, as well as the technologies that support them. As the television screen made the leap from homes to sanctuaries, a new church experience began. Worshipers had the option, no matter how large a building or how far they were from the platform, to see and experience the preacher up close. With the advent of video recording, messages and worship experiences could be replayed like audio recordings. In time, innovators would begin rebroadcasting sermons in order to create additional worship services in different venues and at different sites altogether.

Undergirding this process was the increased speed and proficiency of communication inside the worship service, throughout the church body (gathered and distributed), and out into the community. Computer driven Microsoft PowerPoint presentations cast on video screens began to facilitate worship singing and communication of church events and activities. Email accounts fostered communication between church staff and church members, and then websites emerged to communicate information and to provide resources (like podcasts and Bible studies) to both the churched and unchurched.

Social media mechanisms like Facebook, Twitter, and integrated web-based church software and tools like the City by Zondervan and Church Community Builder

much computer technology was (and continues to be) required to design, maintain, and facilitate these types of exponential growth patterns.

⁸⁰Refer to Rick Levine, Christopher Locke, Doc Searls, David Weinberger, Jake McKee, *The Cluetrain Manifesto: 10th Anniversary Edition* (New York: Basic Books, 2009); and Manuel Castells, *The Rise of the Networked Society*, 2nd ed. (Oxford: John Wiley and Sons, 2009).

now create a ministry milieu in which spatial limitations and boundaries are becoming less of a hindrance to community and relationship development.⁸¹ Communication and collaboration innovations like Skype, Go To Meeting, Google Talk (video), Google Wave, and Google Docs give churches and their leaders significant tools to function both locally and globally.⁸²

As churches began to integrate these technological innovations into their church identity and practice, the multi-site church concept became increasingly tenable. For those who continue to embrace and explore technological innovation within the church, it is likely that the multi-site church concept will become even more attainable and more reasonable as multi-site church expressions become more refined and technologies to support them become more commonplace.

Conclusion

In *The World is Flat*, Friedman explains that the flattening of the world came about because of three processes merging that he calls the “triple convergence.”⁸³ In a

⁸¹“The City” [on-line]; accessed 7 November 2010; available from <http://www.onthecity.org/>; Internet; “Church Community Builder” [on-line]; accessed 7 November 2010; available from <http://www.churchcommunitybuilder.com/>; Internet.

Browning’s explanation of “the City” is helpful: “[Seacoast Church] is also encouraging more contact between group meetings, taking some of the intimacy online through the City (a Facebook-like application developed by Mars Hill Church in Seattle and now marketed by Zondervan). The Church is trying to help take groups from ‘We meet once a week’ to ‘We have a safe place online to connect and share prayer requests.’” Dave Browning, *The Hybrid Church: The Fusion of Intimacy and Impact* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2010), 94.

⁸²“Skype” [on-line]; accessed 7 November 2010; available from <http://www.skype.com/intl/en-us/home>; Internet. “Go to Meeting” [on-line]; accessed 7 November 2010; available from <http://www.gotomeeting.com/fec/>; Internet; “Google Products” [on-line]; accessed 7 November 2011; available from <http://www.google.com/intl/en/options/>; Internet.

⁸³Within his discussion, Friedman describes the triple convergence concept as the coming together of three different phenomena that together reshaped the global framework of globalization and interconnectedness, specifically as it relates to business and information technology. Please note that

similar way, the multi-site church concept was facilitated by a triple convergence of factors: economic advancement, accelerated mobility, and technological innovation. This merger provided a context primed for multi-site churches to emerge and proliferate.

It would take time for the concept to develop, however. While foreshadowing elements of the multi-site concept were in extant, the time of the multi-site church had not yet come. The multi-site church concept could not begin until innovators blended the historic elements of multi-site ministry and the multi-site triple convergence. Once mixed, innovators crafted the multi-site church idea and provided the foundation for what may become a multi-site church revolution. In the chapter to follow, the discussion will turn toward investigating multi-site innovators and the churches they designed.

Friedman spends thirty pages explaining the nuances of the triple convergence concept, so it is recommend that the reader review Friedman's full argument to understand this topic and its implication.

In a paragraph, Friedman explains the components of the triple convergence as follows: "What are the components of this triple convergence? The short answer is this: First, right around the year 2000, all ten of the flatteners discussed in the previous chapter [see n. 2 above] started to converge and work together in ways that created a new, flatter, global playing field. As this new playing field became established, both businesses and individuals began to adopt new habits, skills, and processes to get the most out of it. They moved from largely vertical means of creating value to more horizontal ones. The merger of this new playing field for doing business with the new ways of doing business was the second convergence, and it actually helped to flatten the world even further. Finally, just when all of this flattening was happening, a whole new group of people, several billion, in fact, walked out onto the playing field from China, India, and the former Soviet Empire. Thanks to the new flat world, and its new tools, some of them were quickly able to plug and play, compete, connect, and collaborate with your kids in mind, more directly, cheaply, and powerfully than ever. This was the third convergence." Friedman, *The World is Flat*, 202-03.

CHAPTER 4

THE EMERGENCE OF MULTI-SITE CHURCHES

Introduction

With a suitable background for multi-site understanding in place, the focus of this chapter will shift to identifying multi-site churches in the early stages of the multi-site church movement.¹ While several churches will receive consideration, Randy Pope and his Perimeter Church of Atlanta, Georgia, will be the primary example explored.

By 1990, sufficient factors were converging to see the inauguration of the multi-site church revolution. While the “movement” would begin gradually, by 2006, what proponents herald as the “multi-site revolution” was well underway. The increasing number of recognizable multi-site churches and the proliferation of writings on the topic evidence this reality.² This part of the chapter will detail key multi-site activity and

¹The identification (and in some respects the development) of early multi-site churches is attributable to the thinking, research, and writings of Elmer Towns and Lyle Schaller. Towns’ book, *10 of Today’s Most Innovative Churches* (Ventura, CA: Regal, 1990) is descriptive in nature providing three seminal chapters on the multi-site concept: chap. 5, “An Extended Geographic Parish Church”; chap. 10, “One Church in Two Locations”; and chap. 16, “New Positioning: From Single Campus Ministry to a Multicampus Church.” Schaller’s multi-site writings are more exhaustive and more theoretical: Lyle E. Schaller, *44 Questions for Church Planters* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1992); chap. 4, “The Multi-site Option”; idem, *Innovations in Ministry: Models for the 21st Century* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1993); chap. 5, “The New Partnership”; chap. 6, “Off-Campus Ministries”; chap. 7, “What About the Wounded Birds?”; and chap. 8, “The Multisite Option”; Idem, *Discontinuity and Hope: Radical Change and the Path to the Future* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1999), covered in part within the “Introduction”; chap. 2 “The Big Seven”; and chap. 7, “Seven Neglected Changes”; idem, *A Mainline Turnaround: Strategies for Congregations and Denominations* (Nashville: Abingdon, 2005), various pages.

²In 2006 Surratt, Ligon, and Bird published *The Multi-Site Church Revolution*. Geoff Surratt, Greg Ligon, and Warren Bird, *The Multi-Site Church Revolution: Being One Church . . . In Many Locations* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2006). At this point, the multi-site church gained a much broader

interests between the years 1990 and 2009, and within it the case will be made that the Leadership Network of Dallas, Texas, and emerging multi-site leaders which the organization identified are most responsible for shaping, directing, and accelerating the current and future multi-site movement. As the chapter concludes, space will be given to investigating the current trajectory of the multi-site movement.

The Multi-Site Church Primogenitor

As established previously, features of the multi-site church concept were visible since the time of America's birth. Examples of multi-site ministry in the late 1800s and early 1900s demonstrated an increasing understanding and utilization of multiple site ministry approaches using outpost, chapel, and branch congregation methodologies to evangelize and congregationalize larger groups of people. These approaches, however, did not produce a church model fitting all the criteria of the multi-site church definition. Following World War II, alterations in American culture provided a mixture of social and economic forces that provided the necessary components for developing multi-site churches. According to Earl Ferguson (who wrote the first documented thesis on the multi-site church), by the 1960s and 1970s, several churches were in the multi-site trial process.³

audience, and the multi-site concept, largely due to the churches studied and praised within the book, received instant acclaim.

³Ferguson's list includes Druid Hills Presbyterian Church, Atlanta, GA; Skyline Presbyterian Church, Lemon Grove, CA; First Baptist Church, Atlanta, GA; Mount Paran Church of God, Atlanta, GA; First Community Church, Columbus, OH; First Baptist Church Van Nuys, CA; Northlands Community Church, Longwood, FL; The Church of the Savior, Washington, DC; First Baptist Church Arlington with Mission Arlington/Mission Metroplex, Arlington, TX; Perimeter Church, Atlanta, GA. Earl W. Ferguson, "The Multi-site Church and Disciplemaking" (D.Min thesis, McCormick Theological Seminary, 1997), 18-26. This list again reveals the blurring of multi-site church and ministry understanding. Some of the churches listed are clearly multi-site churches and others are not. For example, Ferguson cites Druid Hills Presbyterian Church, as a multi-site church based upon their employment of the "base satellite church" approach. Ferguson draws the base church model directly from Charles M. Olsen; see Charles M. Olsen,

Unfortunately, Ferguson's discussion is quite brief (ten pages), provides little supporting material, and stretches well beyond the 1960s and 1970s in scope of treatment; nevertheless, another source corroborates Ferguson's claim in part. Gary McIntosh provides the example of Scott Memorial Baptist Church, San Diego, California, which when pastored by Tim LaHaye during the 1970s "was well known to be one church in two locations: Scott East and Scott West."⁴ While other early multi-site churches may have been existent during this era, no clear evidence to date demonstrates this reality.

Starting in the 1980s, however, the existence of the multi-site church concept became apparent with the appearance of several multi-site church primogenitors.⁵ In 1988, Erwin McManus' Mosaic Church went multi-site, albeit for a limited duration. In 1987, in what is somewhat of a watershed year, several churches made the shift to becoming multi-site. Under the leadership of Paul Walker, Mount Paran Church of God,

The Base Church: Creating Community through Multiple Forms (Atlanta: Forum House, 1973), 72-87.

While demonstrating multi-site church tendencies, the base satellite construct falls outside the multi-site church category. Olsen's focus, per his own description of the work, centers upon "building church structures upon a network of interdependent, small, base groups" to bring about the renewal and expansion of the Church. His model is reminiscent of Wesley and Spenser methods and strategy.

It is noteworthy that Earl Ferguson's sons Dave and Jon Ferguson lead one of the earlier and more innovative multi-site churches: Community Christian Church, Naperville, IL. Both brothers are leading voices, both in person and in print, for the multi-site church concept and movement. See Dave Ferguson, Jon Ferguson, and Eric Bramlett, *The Big Idea: Aligning the Ministries of Your Church through Creative Collaboration* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2006); and Dave Ferguson and Jon Ferguson, *Exponential: How You and Your Friends Can Start a Missional Church Movement* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2010), and the NewThing Network (www.newthing.org).

⁴Gary L. McIntosh, *Make Room for the Boom . . . or Bust: Six Models for Reaching Three Generations* (Grand Rapids: Fleming H. Revel, 1997), 138-40.

⁵See Schaller, *Discontinuity and Hope*, 176-77. In *A Multi-site Church Road Trip*, Surratt, Ligon, and Bird present a timeline with the following insertion: "1980s - Interest in multi-site churches expands to approximately 25 churches." Geoff Surratt, Greg Ligon, and Warren Bird, *A Multi-site Church Road Trip: Exploring the New Normal* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2009), 17. Later in the book, Surratt, Ligon, and Bird present what seems to be conflicting information in a table entitled "Number of Known Multi-site Churches in the United States (one church in two or more locations)." In it they say that in 1980, there were "fewer than 100" multi-site churches. It seems reasonable to ask, "Why is there a difference

Atlanta, Georgia, “purchased the property and facilities of Marietta Baptist (14.5 miles away from their existing facilities) and converted them into their second site, Mount Paran North.”⁶ North Heights Lutheran Church, Minneapolis, Minnesota, added a second campus seven miles away from their first site.⁷ Church on the Way, Van Nuys, California, with Jack Hayford as their leader, purchased the building and property of First Baptist Church, Van Nuys, California, which stood a quarter mile away from Church on the Way’s existing site, and converted it into their West Campus.⁸

These three churches regularly receive attention in the literature describing the early development of multi-site churches, and thus deserve mention here. It was another church, however, that would serve as the primogenitor of the multi-site church movement. This church set such a significant precedence that Elmer Towns coined an

between the two numbers?” Ibid., 217. McManus explains that his “first experiment [in multi-site was] more failure than success.” Erwin McManus, foreword to *The Multi-Site Church Revolution*, 7.

⁶Towns, *10 of Today’s Most Innovative Churches*, 166-67. The church website contradicts the dates found within Towns’ chronicling, placing the purchased date of the property in 1985. In 1996, the satellite congregations of Mount Paran became autonomous upon Paul Walker’s departure to become general overseer of the Church of God International. “Mount Paran Church of God: Beliefs, Vision, Values, and History,” Mount Paran Church of God [on-line]; accessed 6 September 2009; available from <http://www.mountparan.com/newsitedev/about.asp>; Internet. See also, Elmer L. Towns, Ed Stetzer, and Warren Bird, *11 Innovations in the Local Church: How Today’s Leaders Can Learn, Discern and Move into the Future* (Ventura, CA: Regal, 2007), 68.

⁷Warren Bird, “One Church in Many Locations—What Multi-site Churches Do in Addition to Worship: Insights from 35 Different Multi-site Churches,” Leadership Network, 2 [on-line]; accessed 24 March 2008; available from www.leadnet.org; Internet. See also, Surratt, Ligon, and Bird, *The Multi-Site Church Revolution*, 193-94.

⁸Towns, *10 of Today’s Most Innovative Churches*, 72. For a more detailed history of Church on the Way’s (COTW) expansion, see “Our History” Church on the Way [on-line]; accessed 30 June 2010; available from http://www.tcotw.org/landing_pages/17,3.html; Internet. COTW was not new to multi-site ministry. McGavran and Hunter record COTW doing satellite ministry before 1980: “The satellite congregation is a newer model in America, having been pioneered in places like Chile and Korea. The Church on the Way (Four Square Gospel) in Van Nuys, California has more than 200 semiautonomous satellite congregations. People hold membership in both the central and satellite congregations. Members meet two Sundays a month in their satellite house churches under a trained leader and the other two Sundays at one of the five worship services of the central congregation.” Donald McGavran and George G. Hunter III, *Church Growth Strategies that Work* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1980), 115-16.

entirely new name to categorize the model, calling it the “Extended Geographical Parish Church” (EGPC).⁹ The church was Perimeter Church, founded by Randy Pope.

Perimeter Church began in 1977 when Pope, having just graduated from seminary, gained employment as a church planter with The Presbyterian Church of America. With no core group or team in place, Randy, Carol, and their two-month-old child moved to Atlanta, Georgia, with a vision to plant a single church with 100 congregations around Atlanta’s Perimeter Highway (Interstate 285).¹⁰ Central to Pope’s vision were four components: (1) “The church was designed to be one local congregation”; (2) their “goal was to have one senior pastor with local pastors at each congregation”; (3) “there was to be one board with three representatives from ‘each congregation’”; and (4) their design called for “one overall program of outreach [to be] conducted through each specific congregation.”¹¹ Pope began planting work in July 1977 and on September 9 of that year, Perimeter Church met for their first worship service.

⁹Towns, *10 of Today’s Most Innovative Churches*, 103. Towns introduces the EGPC as follows: “But with the emergence of an urban mindset and a ‘consumer approach to ministry,’ a new phenomenon has originated that I call ‘the extended geographical church.’ An extended geographical parish church is spread out over a larger area so that it: meets in several locations, operates different ministries in different locations, and has expanded its location geographically in order to reach a larger ‘Jerusalem.’ Another way of describing this concept is: multiple ministries, multiple places of ministry, multiple ministers, but one central organization and one senior pastor.” Ibid., 237-38. See Chandler’s description on the concept: “Southern Baptists talk about ‘satellite’ churches. Elmer Towns, head of the Church Growth Institute in Lynchburg, VA, calls the concept ‘the geographical expanded parish church.’ Others refer to it as the ‘perimeter’ church. Whatever the idea, churches practicing it are the pacesetter ministries on the leading edge of the coming millennium.” Russell Chandler, *Racing toward 2001: The Forces Shaping America’s Religious Future* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1992), 240.

¹⁰Pope explains his appointment further: “The Presbyterian Church of America had hired me to plant a church in Atlanta. They had done so reluctantly. It had been their policy not to begin churches without an established core, but because I came with my clipboard in hand and a sense of calling so intense to plant from scratch, they were willing to sidestep policy and to approve my request. They had sent us to secure an apartment in Atlanta prior to my graduation and had agreed to pay us \$1200 a month for up to 12 months, as needed. So all was set.” Randy Pope, *The Prevailing Church: An Alternative Approach to Ministry* (Chicago: Moody, 2002), 73-74, 128. See Towns, *10 of Today’s Most Innovative Churches*, 90.

¹¹Chandler, *Racing toward 2001*, 243.

Four years later (1980), the church launched their second site, “Perimeter West” in Marietta, GA, and by 1990, Perimeter church had four congregations.¹² Pope provides a glimpse of the growth process:

It became obvious that a church in making such an impact would have to be decentralized into all geographical areas of the city and would have to include many cultures. The expression “One church—many congregations” seems to express the concept. Within two years of beginning Perimeter Church, we felt it was time to birth a second congregation that we called “Perimeter West.” I preached an early service at our original location, left before the service had ended, drove approximately ten miles to our new congregation, and walked in just in time to preach. Then, before the service was complete, I got back into my car and drove back to our original congregation, once again, just in time to preach in the second service.

I did this for almost three years until we hired an assistant pastor to do most of the preaching and to run the day-to-day ministries for Perimeter West. By this time, we had built our first permanent facility, located about ten miles north of our original meeting location. When we moved in, we split the congregation. Those who live north went to the new facility. Those who live south began meeting in a rented facility about five miles south of our original location. Once again, I preached at two locations each Sunday morning—an early and late service at our new facility and a middle service at our new southernmost location, which we called “Perimeter In-Town.”

This process continued for a couple more years until the right assistant pastor was hired. Now there were three congregations under the Perimeter umbrella. Very soon after this, we birthed a new congregation from those attending the service at our newly built facilities. Now there was one church and four congregations. We had a single elder and deacon board and we had one combined staff for all four congregations. We all financially contributed to a combined budget, but otherwise each congregation (after becoming financially sound) was responsible to cover its own needs. I preached at the original congregation three weeks a month, and on each fourth Sunday of the month would rotate to a different congregation. As complicated as it sounds, it all worked surprisingly well.¹³

When Perimeter launched its second site, the age of the multi-site church began. Some may contest here that one of the other churches meeting in multiple locations was in fact the first multi-site church. There is merit to this argument, but it is

¹²Ibid.

¹³Pope, *The Prevailing Church*, 127-28.

limited. Conversely, at least four attributes of the Perimeter Church development qualify it as the primogenitor of the multi-site church movement. First, Perimeter Church came into being with the explicit purpose of being one church in multiple locations. Other early multi-site type churches evolved or fell into the multi-site arrangement, and the majority of the early recorded instances of multi-siting came after Perimeter Church launched its second site. Second, Perimeter Church set a new precedent by moving beyond just a second site to a third and then a fourth site of a single church. While they would not achieve the 100 churches Pope envisioned, the church centered on a multi-site growth philosophy.

Third, Perimeter Church inaugurated a novel church construct when it created a church in which both campuses (along with other campuses as they were launched) were interdependent and “co-autonomous” as one church functioning with the same leadership, nature, and purpose. No evidence demonstrates clearly that a similar arrangement preceded Perimeter’s model. Fourth, the design of Perimeter Church and the language used to describe it by Pope and church researchers alike correlate closely with the language used by Surratt, Ligon, and Bird to define a multi-site church.¹⁴ Thus, Perimeter Church provides the archetype definition from which later multi-site explanations and definitions emerge.¹⁵

Albeit anecdotal, another indicator that Perimeter Church was the first multi-

¹⁴See Pope, *The Prevailing Church*, 94-96, 130-31; Towns, *10 of Today’s Most Innovative Churches*, 90, 96-98, 241-42; and Surratt, Ligon, and Bird, *The Multi-Site Church Revolution*, 7-25.

¹⁵Perimeter Church’s recognition in the developing multi-site church movement is due, in large part, to the work of Elmer Towns. Had he not published his findings about Perimeter Church in his 1990 work, *10 of Today’s Most Innovative Churches*, and had Towns not named the church’s model the “extended geographical parish church,” the multi-site development process may have come slower and looked very different.

site church comes through Randy Pope’s own testimony about the origin of the Perimeter Church concept. After spending approximately “100 hours alone with God seeking a vision given by Him,” Pope formed a vision:

When all was said and done, numerous conceptual components became ingredients of that vision. Since we call this entity a “vision,” let me describe what I saw in my mind’s eye. This was the profile of the church I felt called to plant:

First, I saw a church that could impact an entire metropolitan city by the quality of its disciples. Second, I saw a church geographically broad enough to touch people throughout the entire city. Third, I saw a church socially, economically, and culturally diverse enough to reach every kind of people in Atlanta. Last, I saw individual congregations of equipped believers linked together to alter the spiritual, political, educational, and social structures of Atlanta—that is, a church that would bring Atlanta into an encounter with the kingdom of God.

I cautiously concluded that this vision was God-given, but I realize that only time would tell. Without question, the effort would be faith-oriented for two reasons. *First, I had no idea how to design such a church, nor had I ever seen or read of a church with a similar vision* [emphasis added]. Second, and more significant, was the reality that with me as the church’s pastor, such a vision was certainly doomed to failure unless God be in it.¹⁶

This excerpt strongly suggests that the Perimeter Church conception was the first of its kind and that Pope understood the general structure of what he was to do as a vision birthed from personal interaction with God.¹⁷

Perimeter Church, like many of the early multi-site churches, maintained its multi-site approach for only a limited time. As Pope and his team looked at launching their fifth campus, their excitement waned as the time and energy costs devoted to multiple site launches took their toll on the leadership team.¹⁸ Through a lengthy internal

¹⁶Pope, *The Prevailing Church*, 94-95; see also Surratt, Ligon, and Bird, *The Multi-Site Church Revolution*, 19.

¹⁷Pope elaborates more on this vision. *Ibid.*, 95-96.

¹⁸There seems to be some question as to how many ministries or sites Perimeter Church had at its apex of multi-site church operations. Pope does not exceed four sites in his writings, and Towns verifies that figure with his documentation. Chandler mentions “eight congregations [becoming] autonomous” by 1992. Chandler, *Racing toward 2001*, 243; and William Easum says that by “1992, ten congregations have

and external evaluation process, which included consultation with metachurch designer Carl F. George, the pastoral team of Perimeter Church determined to create a new structure to maintain their vision.¹⁹ Pope explains the structure, their transition to it, and its implications:

Believing there had to be another model that would keep us faithful to our original vision and honor our mission [100 churches around the perimeter of Atlanta], we commissioned four of our best thinkers (an elder from each of our four congregations) to meet with me and creatively explore new options. After many months of meeting, praying, and deliberating, we created a new vehicle to safeguard our vision. We named it Perimeter Ministries International (PMI).

Our plan was to create PMI as a servant organization of the four congregations. As a parent church organization, it would have its own board of directors and would have no direct authority over any of the congregations. Within a year, each of the four congregations of Perimeter Church would particularize (become organized churches) and the assistant pastor at each congregation would become the senior pastor. To eliminate confusion, each church would also rename itself. This plan included a new name for the original Perimeter congregation, but the staff and elders of the three other congregations insisted otherwise.

The function of PMI would be to accomplish the three tasks the “one church—many congregations” had been doing as a combined ministry: (1) to plant and serve new churches, (2) to direct combined resources from the multiple congregations to enable effective ministry to the under-resourced and urban areas of Atlanta, and (3) to broker ministries and materials throughout our congregations so as to enhance the effectiveness of each church

It was my heartfelt conviction that I should stay in the saddle of a local congregation. My passion was still to be close to the heartbeat of a prevailing church. We ultimately decided that I would be full-time pastor at Perimeter and serve as the chairman of the board of PMI.

After ten years of being one church – many congregations, we were now four churches. Under this new structure, we immediately began a new church and then another. We quickly found our new arrangement made it much easier to start churches reaching different people groups. The new church plants had less direct

been established around the perimeter of Atlanta.” Easum, *Dancing with Dinosaurs*, 93. Towns mentions additional churches, not necessarily additional sites per se, but they could be that to which Chandler and Easum are referring: “In the summer of 1989, [Perimeter Church was] joined by an upper-middle-class black congregation in Decatur [GA] and a student congregation that had begun in Athens. This church was not in the original vision, because it is 90 miles from Atlanta. However, those who went to the University of Georgia shared the original vision of Randy Pope and began a perimeter-type church in the university town.” Towns, *10 of Today’s Most Innovative Churches*, 95.

¹⁹Ibid., 96-97.

impact on the staff and schedules of the existing churches. As I write, we now are starting numerous new works each year and expect that to increase annually.²⁰

By 1984, the Perimeter Church model or the Extended Geographical Parish Church had already garnered the attention of Elmer Towns. Tom Cheyney, one of the coauthors of *Spin-Off Churches*, recalls that in that year Towns “challenged a group of us to consider Multi-site and Expanded Geographic Strategy for our present church plants.”²¹ Cheyney, along with Harrison and Overstreet, add other key voices to the era’s sphere of multi-site pundits, positing, “The idea of satellite congregations was promoted widely during the height of the Church Growth Movement by Elmer Towns, Charles Chaney, and Lyle Schaller.”²²

The multi-site church concept, while observable in a few contexts, remained in an embryonic form throughout the 1980s; some churches tried the model only to leave it after a time. Others stayed with the concept, but even the early adopters were plowing new ground conceptually. Thus, the multi-site concept experienced a slow maturity during the 1980s decade.

The 1990s would be an altogether different matter. Just as Friedman argued

²⁰Pope, *The Prevailing Church*, 130-31. In 2010, according to the church website “Perimeter [Church has] planted more than 20 churches throughout the city.” “Why the Name Perimeter Church?” Perimeter Church [on-line]; accessed 1 July 2010; available from <http://www.perimeter.org/index.php?module=visitors§ion=38>; Internet.

²¹Tom Cheyney, “The Multi-Site Church Planting Strategy: One Church Operating in Multiple Locations!” [on-line]; accessed 17 April 2006; available from www.namb.net/atf/cf/%7B087EF6B4.../Multi_Site_Presentation.ppt; Internet. Interestingly, Cheyney credits Fred Smith with developing the “Expanded Geographic Strategy,” stating, “The first pastor to develop this concept was Fred Smith out of Texas. He started these satellites as additional preaching opportunities on Sundays. Once they grew to sufficient size, he called a church planter on staff to lead it further. As he added the extra staff, the church quit being an expanded geographic church, and became its own autonomous work.” Ibid.

²²Rodney Harrison, Tom Cheyney, and Don Overstreet, *Spin-Off Churches: How One Church Successfully Plants Another* (Nashville: B&H, 2008), 76.

that the “flattening of the world” occurred somewhere in the 1990s, the multi-site church revolution began similarly. No single event would launch a new cadre of multi-site churches, but by the end of the twentieth century, multi-site churches were evident and expanding. Perimeter Church unlocked the multi-site model code fully in the 1980s, but the multi-site “tipping point” would result from the culmination of social changes in the latter half of the twentieth century.²³

The Multi-Site Church Revolution: 1990-2010

The Multi-Site Church Revolution era began with a trickle of new multi-site churches; it now burgeons with a torrent of them.²⁴ In January 2007, Stephen Shields presented research on “1000 multi-site churches” conducted by the Leadership Network. Survey question number 5 of the study asked, “What year did you first become multi-site?” Of the 228 churches that responded, 13 churches (6 percent) indicated they had become multi-site before 1996. Twenty-eight (12 percent) said they had become multi-site before the year 2000.²⁵ Thus, based on the study results for every one multi-site

²³These changes refer to the economic, mobility, and technological matters addressed previously. The “tipping point” concept is articulated succinctly (and popularized recently) by Malcolm Gladwell in his work *The Tipping Point*. Gladwell recognizes this concept as “the one dramatic moment in [a situation] when everything can change all at once.” Malcolm Gladwell, *The Tipping Point* (New York: Little, Brown, and Co., 2000), 9. For a more detailed explanation of this idea and references to supporting “classic works of sociology” validating the tipping point model, see Gladwell’s endnotes. *Ibid.*, 281-82.

²⁴In 2003, David Ferguson posited, “An estimated 100 to 200 churches nationwide are experimenting with this [multi-site church] concept.” Dave Ferguson, “The Multi-Site Church: Some of the Strengths of this New Life Form,” *Christianity Today*, 1 (2003) [on-line]; accessed 16 April 2006; available from www.christianitytoday.com/global/printer.html?bcl/areas/vision-strategy/articles/le-2003-002.81.html; Internet.

²⁵At the time of the survey, 31 of the churches in the study indicated that they were not multi-site. Stephen Shields, “Survey of 1,000 Multi-Site Churches: Latest Insights on a Growing Movement,”

church begun before 2000, ten more emerged between 2000 and 2007.

This ratio of nearly 10:1 continues to swell with each passing year. For example, in 2007 alone, Leadership Network elevated their estimated number of multi-site churches from 1,500 to 2,000.²⁶ In their book *A Multi-site Church Road Trip* (2009), Surratt, Ligon, and Bird, affirm the figure of 2,000 multi-sites in 2007 and boosted it again to 2,500 in 2008, and then to 3,000 by 2009.²⁷

Between 1990 and 2009, the multi-site church concept grew and changed drastically. With each passing year, more churches began experimenting with the multi-site ideology. Peter Roebbelen, who took Chartwell Baptist Church, Toronto, Ontario, multi-site in 1993, received a Lily Endowment from the Louisville Institute to research several multi-site churches via onsite visit. From his research and travels, Roebbelen came to the following conclusion:

I think [multi-site] 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. It is a God thing. 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.²⁸

(Dallas: Leadership Network, 2007), 2 [on-line]; accessed 12 January 2008; available from http://www.leadnet.org/resources_downloads.asp; Internet.

²⁶It is interesting that the survey of "1000 Multi-site Churches" was actually a survey of 1,510 multi-site churches. In the words of Stephen Shields, "Leadership Network tracked down e-mail addresses for 1,510 multi-site churches. It sent a survey to each (plus two reminders), resulting in 228 completed surveys. Some 15.1% of the 1,510 churches successfully contacted filled out the survey with responses coming in from every major region of the United States and from a few other countries as well." Ibid. In "Innovation 2007," Leadership Network estimated the number of multi-site churches at 2000. *Innovation 2007: Connecting Innovators to Multiply* (Dallas: Leadership Network, 2007), 13 [on-line]; accessed 2 August 2008; available from www.leadnet.org/innovation2007; Internet.

²⁷Surratt, Ligon, and Bird, *A Multi-site Church Road Trip*, 217.

²⁸Warren Bird and Greg Ligon, "Extending Your Church to More than One Place: A Field Report on the Emerging Multi-Site Movement," Concept Paper (Dallas: Leadership Network, 2003), 4-5 [online]; accessed 23 June 2003; available from www.leadnet.org; Internet. See Surratt, Ligon, and Bird, *The Multi-Site Church Revolution*, 20.

Roebbelen's claims appear valid. Between 1993 and 2000, a host of churches experimented with and embraced a multi-site church framework by launching their first additional site as demonstrated below (Table 2).

As discussed earlier, by the turn of the century the multi-site church concept was proliferating through church growth and church planting circles. Advanced strongly through the exponential growth in Internet usage and technological advancements, multi-site churches were becoming observable, and literature on the topic was just beginning to emerge.

According to Harrison, Cheyney, and Overstreet, “[2005] was the year the multi-site movement moved from the fringe to the mainstream.”²⁹ While it is more plausible that the multi-site concept went “mainstream” only after the book *Multi-Site Church Revolution* went into publication, the multi-site movement began its rapid ascent in 2001.

On September 11, 2001, on a day when the nation watched the events surrounding the World Trade Center attacks, a group of 65 leaders gathered in Chicago, Illinois, for a 24-hour “special forum on the issue of multiple-site, multiple-campus, and multiple-venue congregations.” During this Chicago forum, multi-site leaders collaborated on a larger level and in greater numbers than ever before. Uniting early multi-site adopters, prospectors, and theorists, the gathering galvanized attendees into a shared movement. This single event altered the speed of the entire multi-site movement. At the center of the Chicago forum was the Leadership Network of Dallas, Texas. Since their orchestration of this watershed meeting of multi-site minds, the Leadership Network

²⁹Harrison, Cheyney, and Overstreet, *Spin-Off Churches*, 77.

has continued to orchestrate much of the networking, innovating, and publicizing of the multi-site movement. It is for this reason that the discussion now turns to the significant influence the Leadership Network has had in advancing the multi-site church cause.³⁰

Table 2. Early multi-site church adopters

1994	NewLife Christian Fellowship, Chesapeake, VA Evergreen Community Church, Bloomington, MN
1995	St. Luke's United Methodist Church, Bloomington, IN
1996	Mars Hill Church, Seattle, Washington
1997	Redeemer Presbyterian, Manhattan, NY St. Andrews Presbyterian Church, Tucson, AZ Colonial Presbyterian Church, Kansas City, MO Southside Community Church, Surrey, BC, Canada Woodmen Valley Chapel, Colorado Springs, CO
1998	Eastern Star Church, Indianapolis, IN North Coast Church, Vista, CA Northland: A Church Distributed, Longwood, FL Community Christian Church, Naperville, IN
1999	Colorado Community Church, Aurora, CO First United Methodist Church, Sedalia, MO

³⁰Travis, "Multiple-Site/Multiple-Campus Churches," 1. Because of the terrorism events of that day, not all those who registered attended the meeting, and no record exists that lists all participants who did attend. The following list, however, includes all forty-one churches scheduled to be represented: (1) New Life Christian Church, Centerville, VA; (2) Colonial Presbyterian Church, Shawnee Mission, KS; (3) New Life Community Church, Chicago, IL; (4) Easter Lutheran Church, Eagan, MN; (5) Community Christian Church, Naperville, IL; (6) Colorado Community Church, Englewood, CO; (7) Wooddale Church, Eden Prairie, MN; (8) Evergreen Community Church, Burnsville, MN; (9) Grace Community Church, Clear Lake, TX; (10) First United Methodist Church, Midland, TX; (11) Christ's Church of the Capitol District, Albany, NY; (12) First United Methodist Church, Goshen, IN; (13) Princeton Alliance Church, Plainsboro, NJ; (14) Mars Hill Bible Church, Grandville, MI; (15) Southeast Christian Church, Louisville, KY; (16) Scottsdale Bible Church, Scottsdale, AZ; (17) Seacoast Community Church, Mount Pleasant, SC; (18) First United Methodist Church, Sedalia, MO; (19) Northwest Baptist Church, Oklahoma City, OK; (20) Christ Episcopal Church, Overland Park, KS; (21) Trinity Lutheran Church, Jackson, MS; (22) New Heights Church, Vancouver, WA; (23) St. Paul's Lutheran Church, Aurora, IL; (24) Life Covenant Church, Edmond, OK; (25) Cathedral Second Baptist Church, Perth Amboy, NJ; (26) Upper Arlington Lutheran Church, Columbus, OH; (27) North Coast Church, Vista, CA; (28) Bethlehem Lutheran Church, Minneapolis, MN; (29) Hope Presbyterian Church, Cordova, TN; (30) Saint Luke's United Methodist Church, Indianapolis, IN; (31) Eastern Star Church, Indianapolis, IN; (32) Lord of Life Church, Fairfax, VA; (33) Temple Baptist Church, Hattiesburg, MS; (34) Northland: A Church Distributed, Longwood, FL; (35) North Point Community Church, Dunwoody, GA; (36) Willow Creek Community Church, South Barrington, IL; (37) Crossroads Community Church, Arroyo Grande, CA; (38) The Meeting Place, Winnipeg, Manitoba; (39) Vanguard Ministries, Chesapeake, VA; (40) Grace Community Church,

The Leadership Network

Bob Buford, the chairman and CEO of Buford Television, Inc., founded the Leadership Network (LN) in 1984. A disciple of Peter Drucker, and later the founder of the Peter F. Drucker Foundation for Non-Profit Management, Buford created the LN based upon Drucker's philosophies of leadership, management, and innovation.³¹ A recent LN publication explains the extent of Drucker's influence upon the organization:

Peter Drucker, widely recognized as the founder of modern management, was also a special friend to the Leadership Network. In fact, it's safe to say that this giant's fingerprints are all over the organization. Through his close personal relationship with Bob Buford, Leadership Network's founder and chairman, Mr. Drucker provided the inspiration, wisdom, guidance and even some of the language that today drives what we do.³²

This Druckerian influence is apparent in the mission statement of Leadership Network: "to identify, connect, and help-high capacity Christian leaders multiply their impact."

Key to Drucker's thinking was identifying strong leaders and working to move their leadership and relationship development forward toward maximization. This focus became increasingly evident during Drucker's later years as his attention turned to strengthening non-profit organizations in order to affect social change. This philosophical imprint on Buford and his LN team is vivid in their work with the multi-site church phenomenon.³³ In short, it would not be an overstatement to say that LN is

Tyler, TX, and (41) Princeton Community Church, Pennington, NJ. Dave Travis, phone interview by the author, 16 September 2010.

³¹Douglas B. Sosnick, Matthew J. Dowd, and Ron Fournier, *Applebee's America: How Successful Political, Business, and Religious Leaders Connect with the New American Community* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2006), 119; Bob Buford, "How Boomers, Churches, and Entrepreneurs Can Transform Society" in *The Community of the Future*, ed. Francis Hesselbein et al. (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1998), 35; 42-43.

³²*Innovation 2007: Connecting Innovators to Multiply*, 4.

³³Consider, for example, the "About Leadership Network" section included in Jossey-Bass/Leadership Network publications (and modified somewhat within their Zondervan "Innovation

both the catalyzing agent and the accelerant for the establishment and brisk expansion of the multi-site church movement.

Two examples most clearly demonstrate this reality. The first is the extensive involvement key LN staff members have with the multi-site church movement throughout its development. Three LN team members in particular have had a profound

Series”). There are variations between the different imprints, but the general content is consistent among them all: “Since 1984, Leadership Network has fostered church innovation and growth by diligently pursuing its far-reaching mission statement: to identify, connect, and help high-capacity Christian leaders multiply their impact.

Although Leadership Network’s techniques adapt and change as the church faces new opportunities and challenges, the organization’s work follows a consistent and proven patterns: Leadership Network brings together entrepreneurial leaders who are focused on similar ministry initiatives. The ensuing collaboration—often across denominational lines—creates a strong base from which individual leaders can better analyze and refine their own strategies. Peer-to-peer interaction, dialogue, and sharing inevitably accelerate participants’ innovation and ideas. Leadership Network further enhances this process through developing and distributing highly targeted ministry tools and resources. Including audio and video programs, special reports, e-publications, and online downloads.

With Leadership Network’s assistance, today’s Christian leaders are energized, equipped, inspired, and better able to multiply their own dynamic Kingdom-building initiatives.

Launched in 1996 in conjunction with Jossey-Bass (a Wiley imprint) (2006 with Zondervan), Leadership Network Publications present thoroughly researched and innovative concepts from leading thinkers, practioners, and pioneering churches. The series collectively draws from a range of disciplines, with individual titles offering perspective on one or more of five primary areas: (1) Enabling effective leadership, (2) Encouraging life-changing service, (3) Building authentic community, (4) Creating Kingdom-centered impact, 5) Engaging cultural and demographic realities.” Scott Thumma and Dave Travis, *Beyond Megachurch Myths: What We Can Learn from America’s Largest Churches* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2007), ix; also see M. Rex Miller, *The Millennium Matrix: Reclaiming the Past, Reframing the Future of the Church* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2004), xii; and Hugh Halter and Matt Smay, *The Tangible Kingdom: Creating Incarnational Community* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2008), xi-xii. Zondervan “Innovation Series” examples include Larry Osborne, *Sticky Church* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2008), 203; and Dino Rizzo, *Servolution: Starting a Church Revolution through Serving* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2009), 203-04.

Cf. the above material with the explanation of “About” on LN’s website: “Leadership Network’s purpose is to accelerate the impact of 100X leaders. These high-capacity leaders are like the hundredfold crop that comes from seed planted in good soil as Jesus described in Matt 13:8.”

LN also provides its six “values”: (1) “We explore the ‘what’s next?’ of what could be”; (2) “We create ‘aha!’ environments for collaborative discovery”; (3) “We work with exceptional ‘positive deviants’”; (4) “We invest in the success of others through generous relationships”; (5) “We pursue big impact through measurable kingdom results”; and (6) “We strive to model Jesus through all we do”; and then clarify further: “Believing that meaningful conversations and strategic connections can change the world, we seek to help leaders navigate the future by exploring new ideas and finding application for each unique context. Through collaborative meetings and processes, leaders map future possibilities and challenge one another to action that accelerates fruitfulness and effectiveness. We share the learnings and inspiration with others through our books, concept papers, research reports, e-newsletters, podcasts, videos, and online experiences. This in turn generates a ripple effect of new conversations and further influence.” “About,” Leadership Network [on-line]; accessed 30 November 2010; available from <http://leadnet.org/about/>; Internet.

impact on the multi-site church movement both in their organizational influence and through their writings. The first is Greg Ligon, who joined LN in 1997. Ligon serves as LN's Vice President of Church Innovations and Publisher, where he guides the strategic program for LN. In 2002, Ligon somewhat reluctantly accepted the facilitator role for the first Multi-site Leadership Community.³⁴ Comprised of pastoral leaders from twelve early multi-site churches, this group gathered regularly over a two-year period to explore and develop multi-site understanding and methodology via a collaborative learning process. Though Ligon initially lacked interest in the multi-site idea, his involvement was fortuitous. Through the multi-site community, Ligon developed close relationships with group members, several of whom are featured prominently throughout Ligon's writings, including *The Multi-Site Church Revolution* (2006), *A Multi-site Church Road Trip* (2009), and multiple LN concept papers.

The second team member is Dave Travis, who began working with LN in 1995. As the Managing Director of LN, Travis has worked heavily with megachurches and multi-site churches. His writings include two books treating these topics, *Beyond the Box: Church Innovations that Work* (2003) written with Bill Easum, and *Beyond Megachurch Myths* (2007) written with Scott Thumma. Travis also wrote one of the earliest LN papers on multi-site church movement highlighting "Multiple-Site/Multiple-Campus Churches" (2001).

The third, and most prolific of the LN team trio, is Warren Bird. Bird serves as Director of Research and Intellectual Capital Support for LN. While Bird occupies a critical role within their team, his greatest contributions are visible in his research and,

³⁴Greg Ligon, telephone interview by the author 21 September 2010.

subsequently, his numerous publications. To date, Bird has authored or co-authored 22 books and over 200 articles.³⁵

Since the early 2000s, Bird has been the leading researcher and publicist for the multi-site church movement. He collaborated with Ligon and Geoff Surratt as coauthor of *The Multi-Site Church Revolution* (2006) and *A Multi-site Church Road Trip* (2009), and he has written several other key LN concept papers on multi-site churches, including: “Extending Your Church to More than One Place: A Field Report of the Emerging Multi-Site Movement” (June 2003), “The Emerging Multi-Site Movement” (August 2003), “Launch Factors: When to Start *Your* Next Venue or Site,” “The Leader Making Challenge,” and “Survey of 1,000 Multi-Site Churches: A Dozen of the Most

³⁵These works include Warren Bird and Ed Stetzer, *Viral Churches: Helping Church Planters Become Movement Makers* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2010); Max McLean and Warren Bird, *Unleashing the Word: Rediscovering the Public Reading of Scripture* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2009); Geoff Surratt, Greg Ligon, and Warren Bird, *A Multi-site Church Roadtrip: Exploring the New Normal* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2009); Dale Galloway and Warren Bird, *Innovative Transitions: How Change Can Take Your Church to the Next Level* (Kansas City: Beacon Hill, 2007); Tom Clegg and Warren Bird, *Missing in America: Making an Eternal Difference in the World Next Door* (Loveland, CO: Group, 2007); Elmer Towns, Ed Stetzer, and Warren Bird, *11 Innovations in the Local Church: How Today's Leaders Can Learn, Discern, and Move into the Future* (Ventura, CA: Regal, 2007); Warren Bird, *Innovation 2007: Connecting Innovators to Multiply* (Dallas: Leadership Network, 2007); Geoff Surratt, Greg Ligon, and Warren Bird, *The Multi-Site Church Revolution: Being One Church in Many Locations* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2006); Michael Slaughter, Warren Bird, and Kim Miller, *Momentum for Life: Sustaining Personal Health, Integrity, and Strategic Focus as a Leader* (Nashville: Abingdon, 2005); Robert Lewis, Wayne Cordeiro, and Warren Bird, *Culture Shift: Transforming Your Church from the Inside Out* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2005); Pete Scazzero and Warren Bird, *The Emotionally Healthy Church: A Strategy for Discipleship That Actually Changes Lives* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2003); Dale Galloway with Warren Bird, *Starting a New Church: How to Plant a High-Impact Congregation* (Kansas City: Beacon Hill, 2003); Michael Slaughter and Warren Bird, *UnLearning Church: Transforming Spiritual Leadership for the Emerging Church* (Loveland, CO: Group, 2002); Dale Galloway and Warren Bird, *On-Purpose Leadership: Multiplying Your Ministry by Becoming a Leader of Leaders* (Kansas City: Beacon Hill, 2001); Tom Clegg and Warren Bird, *Lost in America: How Your Church Can Impact the World Next Door* (Loveland, CO: Group, 2001); Elmer Towns and Warren Bird, *Into the Future: Turning Today's Church Trends into Tomorrow's Opportunities* (Grand Rapids: Revell, 2000); Michael Slaughter and Warren Bird, *Real Followers: Beyond Virtual Christianity* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1999); Carl George and Warren Bird, *Nine Keys to Effective Small Group Leadership: How Lay Leaders Can Establish Healthy Cells, Classes and Teams* (Taylors, SC: CDLM, 2007); Carl George and Warren Bird, *The Coming Church Revolution* (Grand Rapids: Revell, 1994); Carl George and Warren Bird, *How to Break Growth Barriers* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1993); and Carl George, *Prepare Your Church for the Future*, ed. Warren Bird (Grand Rapids: Revell, 1991).

Significant Findings,” “One Church in Many Locations: What Multi-Site Churches Do in Addition to Worship” (2005).³⁶

The combined publications of Ligon, Travis, and Bird are complemented by their blogs and regular updates disbursed through Leadership Network’s website, www.leadnet.org. Currently, even the most cursory exploration into multi-site literature reveals a strong tie between Leadership Network and the emergence of the multi-site church movement.

The second example of LN’s solidified role as the primary multi-site movement catalyst is their connecting and networking of multi-site pioneers. Early in the 2000s, several key church leaders gained distinction for being practitioner innovators in the multi-site church movement.³⁷ While a growing number of churches were embracing multi-site nationally, only a small group of individuals emerged as the faces of the multi-site church movement. Among them were Larry Osborne (pastor of Northcoast Church, Vista, California), David Ferguson (pastor of Community Christian Church, Naperville, Illinois), and Greg and Geoff Surratt (pastors of Seacoast Community Church, Mount Pleasant, South Carolina). LN identified these four high-capacity leaders during their early multi-site gatherings.³⁸ Ferguson and Osborne were both a part of the 2001 Chicago forum, and by April 2002, all four leaders were working together through the

³⁶Currently, each of these concept papers is available at no cost from the Leadership Network website (www.leadnet.org).

³⁷Examples include Craig Groeschel, Peter Roebelen, Mark Jobe, Dave Browning, and Jim Tomberlin.

³⁸Dave Travis explains the selection of these individuals: “ If you are going to see a concept diffuse, you have to pick the right leaders We felt that the Surratts [Geoff and Greg], [Larry] Osborne, and [Dave] Ferguson would be best on the platform for advancing the movement. I consider them to be the

launch of the Multi-Site Leadership Community.³⁹ Out of the twelve churches represented within this community, only these individuals (and their church staff members) collaborated together with Leadership Network in a series of “Multi-Site Conferences” in 2006 and 2007.⁴⁰

Through their experiences with LN, the Surratts, Ferguson, and Osborne have each moved their ministries forward toward greater prominence. As Byron Davis, a retired Fischer Price executive and part of the Seacoast team, listened to the discussions at the Chicago forum, he immediately saw the merit of moving Seacoast Church to a multi-site structure.⁴¹ Davis encouraged Greg Surratt to consider the model, believing the multi-site approach was right for Seacoast. Both Greg Surratt and his brother, Geoff Surratt, bought into the concept. Seacoast went multi-site in 2006, and the church now spans across South Carolina and into North Carolina and Georgia. Geoff Surratt, who served as pastor of ministries at Seacoast, coauthored *The Multi-Site Church Revolution* and *A Multi-site Church Road Trip* with Ligon and Bird, and will begin working with

leaders because, though they are brilliant, they do not overpower you. They have thought through their models and they understand them.” Dave Travis, telephone interview by the author, 16 September 2010.

³⁹The twelve churches selected to take part in this Multi-site Leadership Community included Chartwell Baptist Church (suburb of Toronto, Ontario), Christ the King Community Church (north of Seattle, WA), Community Christian Church (Naperville, IL), Fellowship Bible Church (Little Rock, AR), Grace Community Church (Tyler, TX), Gulf Breeze United Methodist Church (Pensacola, FL), Life Church (Edmond, OK), New Life Community Church (Chicago, IL), North Point Community Church (Alpharetta, GA), Seacoast Church (Mount Pleasant, SC), and Willow Creek Community Church (South Barrington, IL). Bird and Ligon, “Extending Your Church to More than One Place,” 2.

⁴⁰The four main sessions for the May 8-9, 2006 conference (Charleston, SC), were led by (1) Osborne, Ferguson, Surratt, and Greg Ligon, (2) Osborne, (3) Surratt, and (4) Ferguson. Some breakout leaders included Geoff Surratt, Chris Surratt, Jason Surratt, Shawn Wood, and Sherry Surratt from Seacoast; Chris Mavity, Jon Ferguson, Tammy Milchien and Eric Bramlett, from Community Christian Church; and Dennis Choy from North Coast Church. It is worthy of note that participants in these “Coast-to-Coast” Multi-site conferences increased from “200 in registrants in 2004, to 500 in 2005, [and then] 700 in 2006.” Towns, Stetzer, and Bird, *11 Innovations in the Local Church*, 69.

⁴¹Dave Travis, telephone interview by the author 16 September 2010.

Rick Warren at Saddleback Church, Lake Forest, California, in 2011.⁴²

Dave Ferguson continues to lead Community Christian Church in their expansion across the Chicagoland area. Ferguson also created a church network and collaboration entity whose mission “is to be a catalyst for a movement of reproducing churches relentlessly dedicated to helping people find their way back to God.”⁴³

Currently, Ferguson’s network encompasses 46 congregations. Ferguson has also co-authored two books. The first book, *The Big Idea: Aligning the Ministries of Your Church through Creative Collaboration* (2007), was written with his brother Jon and Eric Bramlett and published as a vol. in LN Innovation series.⁴⁴ In 2010, the Ferguson brothers co-authored, *Exponential: How You and Your Friends Can Start a Missional Church Movement*, which serves as the anchor work in the new exponential book series.⁴⁵

Larry Osborne continues to expand Northcoast church in Southern California primarily by using the video venue model. His book, *Sticky Church* (2008), which is another LN Innovation Series title, capitalized on the “stickiness” theme made popular by Dan and Chip Heath in their book, *Made to Stick: Why Some Ideas Survive and Others*

⁴²In 2011, Surratt will leave a 14-year tenure at Seacoast Church, his brother Greg Surratt, and many of their relatives involved with the Seacoast leadership team to join the staff of Saddleback Church, Lake Forest, California. Surratt details the change in his blog: “As of January I will become the Pastor of Church Planting at Saddleback Church. Pastor Rick Warren has an amazing vision to plant churches across America and around the world and he has invited me to lead the team which will execute that vision.” Geoff Surratt, “My next assignment,” Geoff Surratt.com-InnerRevolution [on-line]; accessed 25 November 2010; available from <http://geoffsurratt.typepad.com/>; Internet.

⁴³“Affiliate Network” NewThing Network [on-line]; accessed 6 September 2010; available from <https://www.newthing.org/churchplanting/affiliatenetwork/>; Internet.

⁴⁴Ferguson, Ferguson, and Bramlett, *The Big Idea*.

⁴⁵Ferguson and Ferguson, *Exponential*.

Die (2007).⁴⁶ Osborne has contextualized the theme creating the *Sticky Church* website and developing the *Sticky Teams Conference*, both of which are connected to Northcoast Church.

Greg Surratt, Geoff Surratt, Dave Ferguson, and Larry Osborne are indeed the founding faces of the multi-site church movement, but as the movement has grown, so have the numbers of multi-site innovators aligning themselves with LN through both publishing and participation in LN's Multi-Site Leadership Communities. Based on the short history of the multi-site movement, it is clear that the burgeoning of the multi-site phenomenon is linked inextricably to the philosophy, direction, and influence of the LN.

Current Trajectory of the Multi-Site Movement

At present, the multi-site church movement is in only its beginning stages. LN pundits, Surratt, Ligon, and Bird “predict that 30,000 American churches will be multi-site within the next few years,” speculating, “Fifty years ago, the one-venue option was the norm. Fifty years from now, we believe multi-site and multi-venue will be the norm.”⁴⁷ Given the past success of LN in guiding the multi-site movement and its growing ability to influence current and future “high-capacity and innovative” leaders, it is probable that multi-site movement will continue to grow and accelerate.⁴⁸

⁴⁶Larry Osborne, *Sticky Church* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2008); Chip Heath and Dan Heath, *Made to Stick: While Some Ideas Survive and Others Die* (New York: Random House, 2007).

⁴⁷Surratt, Ligon, and Bird, *The Multi-Site Church Revolution*, 10-11.

⁴⁸At the conclusion of “Multisite is Multiplying,” Leadership Network’s most recent concept paper (September 2010), the mission and focus of LN demonstrate revision from previous versions. In explaining LN, the authors state, “Leadership Network fosters church innovation and growth through strategies, programs, tools, and resources consistent with our far-reaching mission: to accelerate the impact of 100x leaders.” The revised LN mission statement says, “Leadership Network’s mission is to identify,

In September 2010, Warren Bird and Kristin Walters presented findings from the most comprehensive multi-site research project to date.⁴⁹ While the gleanings of the “Multisite is Multiplying” report are numerous, four are especially valuable for assessing the current trajectory of the multisite movement. The authors explain them as follows:

Multisites now outnumber megachurches. There are approximately 1,500 US churches with worship attendance of 2000 and higher, known as megachurches. But there are now more multisite churches than that. And the number of multisite churches is growing faster than the number of megachurches.

Multisite is mainstreaming. Efforts at being one church in two or more locations, once dominated by very large churches, continued to inch downward in average size. Attendance at multisite churches – all services, counting both adults and children – currently ranges from the low 100s to over 20,000. The most common size (median) between those extremes is a church with an attendance of 1300. Further, two thirds of multisites are connected with a denomination, nearly half utilize in-person teaching, and a third form [*sic*] through merger with a previously existing church.

Multisite is birthing. A respectable number of multisite campuses are in turn birthing campuses of their own. At the same time, multi-sites are planting other churches. This means that multisite and church planting seem to go hand-in-hand.

Multi-sites have a 90% success rate. Only 10% of surveyed churches report that they’ve had a campus closure.⁵⁰

These four trends (or realities) display the multi-site church concept as a phenomenon that is strong, growing, and gaining momentum.

Conclusion

Looking toward the future, if multi-site churches continue to reproduce with high success rates, and increasing numbers, types, and sizes of churches embrace the multi-site

connect and help high-capacity Christian leaders multiply their impact.” Warren Bird and Kristin Walters, “Multisite is Multiplying: Survey Identifies Leaders Practices and Confirms New Developments in the Movement’s Expansion,” Leadership Network (Dallas), (2 September 2, 2010), 26.

⁴⁹This research “Multisite is Multiplying” project encompasses “416 completed responses by U.S. Protestant multi-site churches,” which is an increase from the 228 included in LN “2007 Survey of 1,000 Multi-Site Churches: Latest Insights on a Growing Movement.” Presently, LN has a database of 1,500 of the purported 3,000 multi-site churches in North America. *Ibid.*, 2, 26.

⁵⁰*Ibid.*, 2-3.

structure, it may take only a few decades before multi-site churches eclipse the populous of plateaued and declining churches in North America. While it is impossible to predict the future with absolute certainty, if current trends hold true, the coming age of the multi-site church is imminent.

At this point, the discussion on the historic development of multi-site churches will end. This chapter and the two preceding it have tracked the historic development of the multi-site church concept, noting key events, individuals, and churches, which were instrumental in shaping the multi-site church phenomenon in North America. Not every step of multi-site development received attention here, nor did every multi-site church or multi-site leader gain mention. Nevertheless, as was the goal of this historical exploration of multi-site churches, the broader framework of the North American multi-site church phenomenon has been assembled.

CHAPTER 5

DEFINITION AND CATEGORIZATION OF MULTI-SITE CHURCH MODELS

Introduction

The goal of this chapter is to present a multi-site church taxonomy that can be used to categorize and classify the various types and models of multi-site churches. This discussion will begin with an overview and analysis of the four primary multi-site classification systems offered by multi-site researcher. From this entry point, a more full-orbed analysis of multi-site churches will be conducted in order to create a foundational taxonomy for the summary and evaluation of multi-site churches.

Overview of Models and Current Multi-site Categorizations

To date, several researchers have set forth various categorizations of multi-site church models.¹ While each source is helpful in introducing the multi-site church

¹For example, the following categorizations range from paragraph to chapter length. Some address multi-site approaches with a limited scope of treatment, while others do so more broadly. This list is not necessarily comprehensive, but it does encompass primary contributions to multi-site classification. Listed chronologically, they include Lyle Schaller, *Innovations in Ministry: Models for the 21st Century* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1994), 64-133, especially, 121; Earl W. Ferguson, "The Multi-Site Church and Disciple Making" (D.Min. thesis, McCormick Theological Seminary, 1997), 19-28; Bill Easum and Dave Travis, *Beyond the Box: Innovative Churches that Work* (Loveland, CO: Group, 2003), 85-103; Warren Bird and Greg Ligon, "Extending Your Church to More than One Place: A Field Report on the Emerging Multi-Site Movement," Leadership Network, 23 June 2003 [on-line]; accessed 23 June 2006; available from www.leadnet.org; Internet; Geoff Surratt, Greg Ligon, and Warren Bird, *The Multi-Site Church Revolution: Being One Church . . . In Many Locations* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2006), 26-42; Elmer Towns, Ed Stetzer, and Warren Bird, *11 Innovations in the Local Church: How Today's Leaders Can Learn, Discern, and Move into the Future* (Ventura, CA: Regal, 2007), 65-70; Rodney Harrison, Tom

concept, no research has yet provided a comprehensive and concise categorization and taxonomy of multi-site churches. Creating such a multi-site church taxonomy is the ultimate objective of this chapter.

Three issues provide challenge in this process. First, multi-site churches are a relatively new phenomenon, and thus it is difficult to account for all the types of multi-sites in operation.² Second, the multi-site church concept is diverse and plural in its expression. Multi-site approaches are as different as the churches that employ them.³ Even multi-site churches in similar areas, with similar resources, may employ different multi-site models.

Third, the number of churches employing the multi-site church model remains relatively few in number. While there may be 3000 multi-site churches in the United States, even Leadership Network, which functions as the leader in multi-site research, has a database of only 1500 of them.⁴ In 2007, Leadership Network captured survey results from just 228 churches. In their second major survey (2010), that number increased to

Cheyney, and Don Overstreet, *Spin-Off Churches: How One Church Successfully Plants Another* (Nashville: B&H, 2008), 77-78; and Scott McConnell, *Multi-Site Churches: Guidance for the Movement's Next Generation* (Nashville: B&H, 2009), 75-88, 134-37.

²In their 2010 study, Bird and Walters report that “99% of surveyed churches [went] multisite within the last 10 years—the average launch date for the first additional campus [of existing churches] is 2006 for all [churches] sizes except 100-499 [in attendance], whose average launch date is 2008.” Warren Bird and Kristin Walters, “Multisite is Multiplying: Survey Identifies Leading Practices and Confirms New Developments in the Movement’s Expansion,” Leadership Network (Dallas) 2 September 2010, 3 [on-line]; accessed 4 September 2010; available from http://leadnet.org/resources/download/multisite_is_multiplying_new_developments_in_the_movements_expansion/; Internet.

³Surratt, Ligon, and Bird, explain it this way: “The ways that churches are employing the multi-site strategy vary as much as churches do. The approaches are not easy to categorize because most multi-site churches are a blend of several models. Although we have chosen to confine our discussion to five broad models, these models are being tailor fit to local contexts in numerous ways.” Surratt, Ligon, and Bird, *The Multi-Site Church Revolution*, 41.

⁴Bird and Walters, “Multisite is Multiplying,” 2.

416.⁵ Even without duplication of survey respondents (which is unlikely), the largest number of possible subjects combined with both studies does not exceed 644 churches.

Despite these challenges, a multi-site taxonomy remains attainable. Within this chapter, four multi-site classifications will be presented and examined briefly. These will include Lyle's Schaller's "seven most highly visible multi-site expressions" (1994); Bill Easum and Dave Travis' "7 Effective [Multi-site] approaches" (2003); Geoff Surratt, Greg Ligon, and Warren Bird's "Five Models" (2006); and Rodney Harrison, Tom Cheyney, and Don Overstreet's "Major Approaches to the Multi-site Church" (2008). Following each multi-site classification presentation, an appraisal will be given highlighting the primary strengths and weaknesses of the specific system. Then the chapter's focus will turn to assembling a comprehensive multi-site taxonomy using elements of the four classifications, in addition to supplemental literature on multi-site typology and findings gleaned by the author through interviews of multi-site practitioners and researchers.

Multi-site Model Descriptions and Examples

Based on the chronology of multi-site literature, Lyle Schaller was the first individual to offer a multi-site categorization of any type. As early as 1991, Schaller was introducing the "multi-site option" nomenclature to his readership.⁶

⁵Ibid., 26.

⁶Lyle Schaller, *44 Questions for Church Planters* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1991), 56-58.

Lyle Schaller's "Seven Most Highly Visible Multi-site Expressions" (1994)

Schaller's research on expansion and contraction of rural and urban churches and parishes of the twentieth century unearthed a unique perspective on multi-site churches. In 1982, Schaller penned *The Small Church is Different*, and in it provided church models displaying latent multi-site church attributes.⁷ These models include multi-church parishes, federated churches, "one congregation with two meeting places," yoked fields, and larger parish churches.⁸

In an excerpt from his discussion on the multi-church parish or circuit, Schaller explains a church organizational concept remarkably similar to contemporary multi-site church expressions:

While support for this alternative has been diminishing in recent years, thousands of smaller congregations share a pastor with one or more congregations from the same denominational family. The United Methodist Church and the Lutheran Church in America have been the leaders in the practice of this arrangement, although it is widely used by at least a dozen other denominations, including the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod, the United Presbyterian Church, and The United Church of Christ.

In the typical arrangement, the minister serves on a full-time basis, has no outside employment, the economic compensation package is divided among the participating congregations, and the minister preaches at two or three different

⁷Lyle Schaller, *The Small Church is Different* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1982), 91-111.

⁸Ibid. These models give helpful perspective on historical variations of multiple-site, decentralized church arrangements, and as such deserve mention. Because there are few correlations between these varied models and multi-site church expressions prevalent today, however, little attention needs to be given to these models here.

The literature on cooperative multiple-church arrangements is not insignificant. For further description and explanation of these methodologies, see Harlow S. Mills, *The Making of A Country Parish* (New York: Missionary Education Movement, 1914); Edmund Des. Brunner, *The Larger Parish: A Movement or an Enthusiasm* (New York: Institute of Social and Religious Research, 1934); Arthur Wentworth Hewitt, *God's Back Pasture: A Book of the Rural Parish* (Chicago: Willett, Clark & Company, 1941); James McLeod Carr, *Bright Future: A New Day for the Town and Country Church* (Richmond, VA: John Knox Press, 1956); Marvin T. Judy, *The Cooperative Parish in Nonmetropolitan Areas* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1967); Marvin T. Judy, *The Parish Development Process* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1973); and Marshall E. Schirer and Mary Anne Forehand, *Cooperative Ministry: Hope for Small Churches* (Valley Forge, PA: Judson Press, 1984).

places every Sunday morning. Sometimes a lay volunteer serves as liturgist and begins the worship service at the second (or third) church on the Sunday morning schedule, in case the preacher's arrival has been delayed.

Frequently the only things the participating churches have in common are (a) they are part of the same denomination, (b) they share the minister's time, (c) they divide the cost of the minister's compensation among them, and (d) they may have a joint personnel search or pastor-parish relations committee that is responsible for seeking a new minister when the present pastor departs. Occasionally they do some joint programming together, such as a Good Friday service, a Thanksgiving service, or a youth group, but that is not the usual pattern.⁹

The primary difference between church formulations that Schaller highlights above and contemporary multi-site churches is the issue of growth direction. While in some cases, combination (merger) arrangements that Schaller highlights were designed to reach or service larger populations, most often these situations arose from negative growth trends. Contraction, not expansion, caused these churches or groups of churches to demonstrate a multi-site church like appearance. Conversely, contemporary multi-site churches expand because of growth.¹⁰ When Schaller wrote *Innovations in Ministry: Models for the 21st Century* (1994), he envisioned a contraction-based model to be the most common form of multi-site churches in the future:

What probably will turn out to be the most widely followed use of the [multi-site] concept, however, began to appear in rural America in the 1950s. The typical arrangement calls for an administrative merger of one or two or three small open-country churches with a larger congregation in town. The desired result is one governing board, one budget, one treasury, one staff, three Sunday schools, three sets of trustees, three meeting places, and three or four or five worship services on Sunday morning. In a typical arrangement, the senior minister preaches in one of the two small congregations on alternative Sundays as well as the town church on Sunday morning, while the associate (who may be a licensed but not ordained preacher) preaches at the early service in town and alternates between the two small

⁹Schaller, *The Small Church is Different*, 96-97.

¹⁰One may contest this issue by arguing that adoption of older or dying churches is a form of contraction. While some contraction may be evident in such cases, the movement toward a multi-site in these case surfaces because of strength and sustainability of a more healthy church.

churches. (One of the two small congregations has worship followed by Sunday school, while the other has Sunday school followed by worship.)¹¹

Schaller's forecast that most churches would become multi-site by merger did not prove accurate. Nevertheless, aspects of his multi-site commentary would prove insightful and enduring. Just a paragraph before the above quoted paragraph, Schaller provides the first documented classification of multi-site churches, rendered as "The seven most highly visible expressions of the multi-site option" (Table 3).¹² Typical of his writing style, Schaller provides a short list of these "expressions" in a single paragraph and then elaborates on them in various sections and chapters throughout the book. For ease of explanation, these types will be delivered in chart form, as will the remaining classifications throughout the chapter. The charts will include (1) the multi-site "model," "expression," or "approach," (2) the author's brief description of the multi-site, and (3) any examples used by the author in his explanation of the specific multi-site type.

Schaller's explanation of each type is brief with the exception of the "Key Church Strategy" and "wounded bird" options, to which Schaller gives entire chapters. While these seven "options" would not enjoy permanent use as multi-site labels, they were important for several reasons.

First, they identified different facets or approaches of the multi-site phenomenon. While Elmer Towns preceded Schaller in highlighting multi-site churches like Perimeter Church ("Extended Geographical Parish Church") and Mount Paran Church of God ("One Church in Two Locations") in *10 of Today's Most Innovative*

¹¹Schaller, *Innovations in Ministry*, 121.

¹²Ibid.

Table 3. Lyle Schaller's "seven most highly visible multisite expressions" (1994)

Multi-Site Expression	Description	Examples Given
Downtown church with Satellite	"the downtown church with the satellite is little more than a preaching point, not a seven-day-a-week ministry center" ¹³	First United Methodist Church, Houston, Texas
Urban Church	"the urban church with two or three or four off-campus meeting places"	None given
Relocation	"the use of this option as one step in an extended relation process"	First Community Christian Church, Columbus, Ohio
Multi-ethnic Urban-Suburban	"the predominately black central-city congregation and the predominately Anglo suburban congregation"	None given
Key Church Strategy ¹⁴	"as a product of the Key Church Strategy"	First Baptist Church, Dallas, Texas Gambrell Street BC, Fort Worth, Texas First Baptist Church, Arlington, Texas
Wounded Bird ¹⁵	"as an expression of the large congregation caring for wounded birds"	First Baptist Church, Houston, Texas
"Mothering" Strategy	"as a typical strategy for 'mothering' new missions"	Perimeter Church, Atlanta, Georgia

¹³Ibid.

¹⁴For further elaboration on the Key Church Strategy, see previous chapter. In short, this multi-site approach utilizes a primary or "key" church to launch a series of indigenous satellite churches around a delineated area or region. Ibid., 71.

¹⁵Schaller uses this borrowed term from an "executive presbyter" who was describing smaller existing churches too weak to achieve continued stability: "They have too much life in them to roll over and die, but it's clear they will never fly again." Ibid., 98-99. He elaborates on the model further: "From a strategic perspective the typical prescription for a wounded bird calls for the congregation to merge with a strong congregation. (For this discussion, these will be called 'sponsoring churches' or 'missionary congregations.')

The members of the wounded bird become members of this missionary church. Title to all real estate is transferred to the missionary church, often with the stipulation that it cannot be sold or otherwise disposed of for at least five years, unless it is turned over to a new congregation." Ibid., 104.

Churches (1990), Towns simply identified and explained the general concept.¹⁶ Schaller went further by identifying a large number of types and cataloguing them.

Second, Schaller's work unlocked a broader understanding of the multi-site church concept. Towns' work identified two very large churches using a multi-site ministry model. Based on his research, multi-site churches appeared to be only in larger and innovative churches. Schaller brought exposure to multi-site churches that were diverse in approach, size, ethnicity, and purpose.

Third, Schaller identified at least two types of multi-site church arrangements that remain primary to multi-site categorization today. As will be seen shortly, with the "strong church/weak church approach" and "resurrection model" designated by Easum and Travis in *Beyond the Box* (2003) and Harrison, Cheyney, and Overstreet in *Spinoff Churches* (2008) respectively, the wounded bird category remains visible within later titles.¹⁷ Another example is the Key Church Strategy. Easum and Travis' "apartment approach," Surratt, Ligon, and Bird's "partnership model" (2006), and Harrison, Cheyney, and Overstreet's "satellite model" are each recapitulations or variations of the Key Church concept.¹⁸ Other commonalities between Schaller's "expressions" and more recent multi-site classifications will become evident as the discussion progresses.

¹⁶See chapter four, "An Extended Geographical Parish Church," chapter ten, "One Church in Two Locations," and chapter sixteen, "New Positioning: From Single Campus Ministry to a Multicampus Church." Elmer Towns, *10 of Today's Most Innovative Churches* (Ventura, CA: Regal, 1990), 89-104, 163-76, 237-46.

¹⁷Easum and Travis, *Beyond the Box*, 95-96; Harrison, Cheyney, and Overstreet, *Spin-Off Churches*, 78.

¹⁸Easum and Travis, *Beyond the Box*, 93; Surratt, Ligon, and Bird, *Multi-Site Church Revolution*, 37-39; Harrison, Cheyney, and Overstreet, *Spin-Off Churches*, 77-78.

The primary weaknesses of Schaller's classification system are threefold. First, Schaller presents minimal documented research to validate his conclusions. Most of what he does offer, with the exception of the Key Church Strategy, the wounded bird approach, and the relocation expression, appears to be anecdotal and grounded in his personal observation alone. Second, in his free flowing fashion, Schaller discusses what he knows about in detail and then skirts over less familiar topics with extreme brevity. This writing style presents numerous challenges in using his work as a basis for multi-site formulation. Third, Schaller's is the first apparent attempt at multi-site classification. Thus, as with many early findings, further investigations reveal necessary additions and subtractions of information or ideas. Not surprisingly, Schaller's entry effort into multi-site church classification does not adequately encompass the variety of multi-site church expressions of today.

Bill Easum and Dave Travis' "7 Effective [Multi-site] Approaches" (2003)

Nine years after Schaller presented his seven "multi-site expressions," Bill Easum and Dave Travis devoted a chapter to describing multi-site churches in *Beyond the Box*, entitled "Beyond a Single Location: One Church in Many Locations."¹⁹ With nearly a decade longer to observe multi-site church development (2004), Easum and Travis presented "seven effective approaches" to being multi-site.²⁰

Both Easum and Travis individually would have been well qualified to submit these new categories. Easum was among the earliest to identify the multi-site concept in

¹⁹Easum and Travis, *Beyond the Box*, 85-103.

²⁰*Ibid.*, 86.

print. In his book, *Dancing with the Dinosaurs*, while not using the term “multi-site church” per se, Easum grouped together multi-site ministry, satellites, and geographically expanded parish churches.²¹ Easum writes, “*Multi-site campuses are becoming common* [emphasis original]. These experiments are called satellites, or geographically expanded (or perimeter) parish churches. They operate on the hub-and-spoke concept with one central congregation and many branch congregations.”²² While basic, it is important to note that in place of “multi-site church,” Easum utilized the title “multiple-site congregations” as a label for the concept within the remainder of his discussion. His appraisal of why “multi-sites” are becoming more common demonstrates that what Easum was referring to were indeed early multi-site churches.²³

In his role with Leadership Network, Travis was instrumental in bringing greater attention to the multi-site movement. He was present at the first large scale multi-site gathering in September 2001, writing a follow up article on the meeting. Between 2001 and the time of publishing *Beyond the Box*, Travis remained integrally involved in work with several multi-site pastors.

Even as the authors introduce their multi-site categories in *Beyond the Box*, they acknowledge the array of multi-site church structures available. Instead of attempting to explain all possible multi-site structures, Easum and Travis focus on those

²¹William Easum, *Dancing with the Dinosaurs: Ministry in a Hostile & Hurting World* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1993), 92-95.

²²Ibid., 92.

²³Easum explains, “Multiple-site congregations are becoming common for several reasons: (1) Overhead costs are reduced; (2) people are more focused on God than on buildings or sacred furniture or rooms; (3) congregations located on postage stamp properties, unable to relocate due to the cost, can still grow; (4) creative congregations can have a variety of ministries in a variety of locations; (5) congregations can do ministries that are conflicting in nature such as half-way houses and weekday child care.” Ibid.

they perceive to be most valuable. They explain, “Although some common denominators exist in most multisite congregations, we haven’t found any cookie-cutter pattern.

Instead, we’ve identified at least seven effective approaches.”²⁴ Below is their list of multi-site approaches (Table 4).

Table 4. Bill Easum and Dave Travis’ “7 Effective[Multi-site] Approaches” (2003)

Effective Approaches	Description	Example(s) Given
The Apostle Approach	“It’s one thing to be the pastor of a multisite congregation; it’s another thing to be the apostle of a multisite movement. Pastors of multisite congregations are moving out of the role of local pastor and into the role of apostles whose primary responsibility is to oversee the multiple sites. No longer is the pastor or the primary pastor/teacher of any one congregation. We expect to see this trend increasing as more leaders move beyond the box of the local church to embrace a kingdom-movement attitude.” ²⁵	Community Christian Church, Naperville (Chicago), Illinois NewLife Christian Fellowship, Chesapeake, Virginia
The Video Venue Approach	“As we move further into a world that accepts video as a major form of communication and entertainment, congregations are finding that teaching by video is not only acceptable but also often preferable to live presentations Don’t confuse the video venue with a video overflow room. The former is not an optional worship service. Each one has live worship and a live host, but the teaching comes via video. During the teaching time, attendees view a full-screen video of the message by which member of the teaching team is teaching that week.”	North Coast Church, Vista, California North Point Community Church, Alpharetta (Atlanta), Georgia
The Rent Approach	“As more and more churches face factors that hinder the construction of new churches—such as zoning restrictions, environmental requirements, and escalating land prices—more churches are experimenting with using only rented facilities and never owning property.”	Evergreen Community Church, Twin Cities, Minnesota

²⁴Easum and Travis, *Beyond the Box*, 86.

²⁵Ibid., 85-103.

The Apartment Approach	<p>“Many beyond-the-box congregations are more concerned with changing their cities than with growing their churches. Therefore, they form alliances with anyone in the city, regardless of denominational affiliation, in their efforts to reach the city for Christ In this approach, lay Christians from across denominational boundaries gather people for Bible studies and apartment clubhouses, mobile homes, and neighborhoods This allows specialized congregations to meet the needs of many might grow-niches based on culture and social need. The ultimate goal is to provide an opportunity for every person in the city . . . to hear and respond to the gospel of Jesus Christ.”</p>	<p>First Baptist Church/Mission Arlington, Ft. Worth, Texas</p>
A Mainline Approach	<p>“Mainline congregations are beginning to develop multisites, although most of them would not consider themselves part of a movement. Perhaps this is because of their strong ties to a denomination. The goal of these congregations usually centers on expanding their mission, reaching a different demographic, or dealing with the landlocked situation.”</p>	<p>St Luke’s United Methodist Church (The Garden), Indianapolis, Indiana</p> <p>Bethlehem Lutheran Church (Spirit Garage), Minneapolis, Minnesota</p> <p>Upper Arlington Lutheran Church, Columbus, Ohio</p>
A Small Church Approach	<p>“Contrary to popular opinion, multisite ministry isn’t just a large-church luxury. We found many examples of multisite congregations with around four hundred in worship and a couple of examples with under two hundred.”</p>	<p>First United Methodist Church, Sedalia, Missouri</p>
The Strong Church/Weak Church Approach	<p>“In this approach the healthy church takes a very strong leadership position over the hurting congregation, often taking it over and forming a partnership. When a dominant congregation gives leadership in the new location, the future success tends to be much better than when a weaker congregation still attempts to lead itself. The healthy church provides the staff and program for the hurting congregation and eventually absorbs the weaker church.”</p>	<p>Lord of Life Lutheran Church, Fairfax, Virginia</p>

Easum and Travis’s descriptions of their seven effective approaches are beneficial for several reasons. First, building on Schaller’s earlier findings, the authors refine several of the multi-site types Schaller labeled, and in the process they bring a clearer explanation of what it means for a church to be multi-site. Second, Easum and

Travis give concise explanations of each multi-site type. Unlike Schaller's extremes of multi-site category definition which are either highly exhaustive or non-existent, Easum and Travis gift their readers with a clear understanding of each model. Third, the tandem uses a specific church (and on occasion two) to explain each model. This validation by practical example brings greater strength and better understanding to their multi-site classification.

The first, and perhaps greatest, weakness of their categorization rests not in the hands of the author, but in the timing of their research. In 2003, the multi-site church movement was still new, and multi-site models and variations were understood somewhat nebulously. While aware of the multi-site concept, Easum and Travis (like other multi-site researchers and practitioners of that time) were just beginning to identify those churches using the multi-site concept. With the limited sample pool of identified multi-site churches (many of whom would have attended or been invited to the 2001 multi-site/multi-campus form in Chicago, Illinois), categorization would have been difficult. In short, Easum and Travis were attempting to define and describe models based on introductory information they had about no more than 100 churches.

Second, while helpful, Easum and Travis' descriptions of each model are brief. They give between a half to three simple pages to explaining each model. Thus, their readers get little more than a snapshot of each multi-site approach as they read. Had Easum and Travis incorporated some additional research or validation, they would have strengthened their classification.

Geoff Surratt, Greg Ligon, and Warren Bird's "Five [Multi-site] Models" (2006)

When Surratt, Ligon, and Bird published *The Multi-Site Church Revolution* in 2006, they presented the most thorough, detailed, and extensive multi-site research project to date.²⁶ Before this book, only articles and few book chapters had explored the multi-site church concept. Much of what had been written was attributable in large part to Greg Ligon and to Warren Bird especially.²⁷ As a result, their employer, Leadership Network, was (and continues to be) the leading purveyor of multi-site church knowledge and understanding. Thus, better than anyone else this triad of writers was well suited to identify and classify multi-site church models.

Their "Wide Variety of Models" chapter (twenty pages) captures their understanding of primary multi-site church approaches as highlighted in the table below (Table 5). Before presenting their models, however, Surratt, Ligon, and Bird provide a helpful and necessary caveat, stating, "The variety of ways in which churches today can adapt the multi-site approach is *unlimited* [emphasis added]."²⁸ They elaborate further:

When asked, "Is there an approach or model that works best?" we have been hard pressed to identify such. There are many models, seemingly almost as many as there are conversations about multi-site churches. Each week we hear of churches that are new to the multi-site movement, and from each conversation comes a new angle or facet of being multi-site. That being said, for the purpose of providing some "handles" for exploring the models presented in this book, we have identified five broad categories.²⁹

²⁶Surratt, Ligon, and Bird, *The Multi-Site Church Revolution*, 26-42.

²⁷For example, see David Ferguson, "The Multi-site Movement," *Journal of the American Society for Church Growth* 16 (Winter 2005): 77-86.

²⁸Surratt, Ligon, and Bird, *The Multi-Site Church Revolution*, 29.

²⁹*Ibid.*, 29-30.

Table 5. Geoff Surratt, Greg Ligon, and Warren Bird’s
“Five [Multi-site] Models” (2006)

Multi-site Model	Description	Example(s) Given
Video-Venue Model	“Creating one or more on-campus environments that use video-cast sermons (live or recorded), often varying the worship style.” ³⁰	North Coast Church, Vista, California Seacoast Church, Mount Pleasant, South Carolina North Point Community Church, Atlanta, Georgia Northland—A Church Distributed, (Longwood) Orlando, Florida
Regional-Campus Model	“Replicating the experience of the original campus at additional campuses in order to make church more accessible to other geographic communities.”	New Life Church, West Linn (Portland), Oregon Willowcreek Community Church, South Barrington (Chicago), Illinois Eastern Star Church, Indianapolis, Indiana
Teaching-Team Model	“Leveraging a strong teaching team across multiple locations at the original campus or an off-site campus.”	Community Christian Church, Naperville, Illinois First Baptist Church Windermere, (Windermere) Orlando, Florida
Partnership Model	“Partnering with a local business or nonprofit organization to use its facility beyond a mere ‘renter’ arrangement.”	Stillwater United Methodist Church, Dayton, Ohio
Low-Risk Model	“Experimenting with new locations that have a low level of risk because of the simplicity of programming and low financial investment involved but that have the potential for high returns in terms of evangelism and growth.”	Christ the King Community Church, Mount Vernon (Seattle), Washington

The strengths of the *Multi-Site Church Revolution* model construct are numerous. First, per the author’s explanation, the models generally encompass the multi-

³⁰Ibid., 29-45.

site churches discussed in the work.³¹ This sample size would be the largest incorporated into a multi-site church study, and thus the authors' findings would have had the highest possibility for correlating models to actual observed phenomena. Easum and Travis, and Schaller before them based their research on a limited number of churches, and little if any quantifiable research was available to validate their findings. Second, as a group Surratt, Ligon, and Bird collectively offer a well-informed, holistic understanding of existing multi-site churches and the multi-site church movement. What their predecessors of multi-site research were only beginning to observe, they had come to understand well. Thus, even with fewer models (only five) included in their classification, the team most capably identified general multi-site models.

In highlighting weaknesses of Surratt, Ligon, and Bird's models, it should be acknowledged that their contribution was and remains important. In many respects, their work set the standard for multi-site church classification. Nevertheless, their model does present some weaknesses. First, the model is limited. By their own admission, Surratt, Ligon, and Bird, acknowledged the vast array of multi-site approaches, but chose to limit their categorization to five basic types. It would seem that with so many different models in use that the authors could have gone further in identifying and classifying more "models," especially since they would have the largest (and growing) database of churches from which to glean categorization.

The second weakness, and this issue is not necessarily unique to their formulations, is that they focus their "model" labels not on models, but rather multi-site

³¹These include the 57 multi-site churches, many of which are well-known, influential, and innovative. See "Appendix C," Surratt, Ligon, and Bird, *The Multi-Site Church Revolution*, 202-08.

methodology used by churches. Perhaps this matter is what the authors struggle with when there are “as many models as there are conversations,” but then limit themselves to only five multi-site models. Third, while providing more lengthy explanations for each model than the earlier model formulations, Surratt, Ligon, and Bird focus their writing more on description than definition. While somewhat helpful and concise, their five classifications are imprecise and vague. Had the authors given a fuller definition within each model, their descriptions would be much more helpful in understanding the various models (or methodologies) of multi-site churches.

Rodney Harrison, Tom Cheyney, and Don Overstreet’s “Major Approaches to the Multi-site Church” (2008)

The multi-site church model classification found in *Spinoff Churches* comes from Rodney Harrison’s research. As Harrison recounts, Charles L. Chaney, author of *Church Planting at the End of the Twentieth Century*, and fellow employee at the Home Mission Board of the Southern Baptist Convention, introduced Harrison to the multi-site church concept during a personal conversation in 1994.³² Over the ensuing decade, Harrison became more familiar with multi-site churches through personal involvement and research.

In 2004, Harrison attended the annual meeting of The American Society of Church Growth, in Pasadena, California. While there, he listened to Dave Ferguson, Lyle Schaller, and Elmer Towns as they presented the growing multi-site church concept.

³²Charles L. Chaney, *Church Planting at the End of the Twentieth Century*, rev. ed. (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House, 1991); Rodney Harrison, interview by author, telephone conversation, 14 September 2010.

Throughout the event, Harrison took copious notes, documenting each type of multi-site model discussed.³³ After reviewing his notes and the meeting handouts, Harrison constructed succinct definitions for all the models. As Harrison explains, “those notes became the heart of the [multi-site] chapter in [*Spinoff Churches*].”³⁴

Within five pages in *Spin-Off Churches*, Harrison briefly introduces the multi-site church concept. While the chapter offers helpful insight on the multi-site church phenomenon, its greatest contribution is the chronicling of multi-site approaches. Harrison’s ten models (Table 6) present the most exhaustive classification of multi-site church types thus far.

Table 6. Rodney Harrison, Tom Cheyney, and Don Overstreet’s “Major Approaches to the Multi-site Church” (2008)

Multi-Site Approach	Description
The Franchise approach	“As much as possible, these new worship communities are ‘cloned.’ There is a ‘branding’ element in this approach, where the sermon, songs, and other aspects of the worship service are generally copied from the mother or originating church. These often take on the flavor of a company owned franchise.” ³⁵
The Licensee approach	“These multi-site churches are similar to ones following the franchise approach, but they are not identical. About half of the elements are similar, but there is more contextual freedom. For example, there might be the same biblical text, but there might be a different presentation. One could envision this approach as being something like a privately owned franchise. In these cases, the site or ‘regional campus’ might have its own budget, worship teams, and youth programs. Other components, including the message (often using a one-week video delay) and children’s programs, may be clones of the main campus.”

³³Ibid.

³⁴Ibid.

³⁵Harrison, Cheyney, and Overstreet, *Spin-Off Churches*, 77-78.

The New Venture model	“In this approach, the ultimate objective to starting the off-campus site is a new church plant. New venture models seek to start churches intentionally once the off-campus site demonstrates adequate maturity.”
The Encore model	“In this model, an encore presentation of the service is held in another location. For example, holding a worship service on Saturday, and then doing the same service again on Sunday at another location using the same team. An encore approach may find the ‘main’ service held at a local movie theater, then using the same team, an ‘encore service’ might be held later that day at a local high school.”
The Satellite model	“In this approach, a main campus might have dozens of satellite congregations meeting in various locations, including apartment buildings, homes, office buildings, and schools. This method may include features of what is called the cell church, with the difference being that the members of satellite churches usually are not expected to come together in large celebration services, as is the case with cell churches. If most of the attendees never worship at the main campus, the churches are functionally satellite multisite churches rather than cell churches. (The Yoido Full Gospel church in Seoul, South Korea, is an example of this.)”
The Déjà model	“This model, which is similar to the franchise approach, seeks to incorporate the elements of the original service to provide worshipers a family feeling and presence to the main campus worship.”
The Third Place model	“From a book on the same name, the third-place model recognizes that for most people, their first place is their home, their second place is at work, and their third-place is where they want to be—where they enjoy hanging out. Third places can be effective locations for multi-site ministry. Going to where people want to be, such as theaters, sports cafés, coffee houses, community hangouts, or other ‘third places’ can reduce the barriers to the unchurched.”
The Video Venue model	“Use of video or digital means to ‘cinematize’ the church (and experience) including the worship and message in a second (or more) location. The use of tape delay allows for editing and involves less technology cost up front. Often a church with multiple services will tape each service and use the best of the tapes. Some churches are its peer mentoring with live feeds, which allow congregations to use the same worship guide and, if using two-way radio, provide real time interaction via video.”
The Resurrection model	“Going into a dead or declining church and starting a multisite service. This model is becoming a popular and timely response to the thousands of church buildings that are vacant or host to declining congregations. This approach works especially well when the main campus has a number of members or families near the new site who are willing to attend the ‘resurrection’ multi-site location. Those adopting this model might consider a ‘funeral celebration’ for the old church, then launching the new multi-site.”
The Multicultural model	“These multi-sites will use the same sermon and program that have been translated into the language and culture of the community. This is a potential response to transitional communities and can build bridges among cultures.”

The ten model multi-site formulation presented in *Spin-off Churches* is helpful

for at least two reasons. First, Harrison attempts to identify all known multi-site models in his list. In this regard, Harrison's work exceeds previous multi-site model classifications. One could argue, of course, that many more multi-site models do exist, yet when juxtaposed against previous model formulations, Harrison's list is far more extensive both in scope and treatment. Second, of the four model formulations presented thus far, Harrison offers the best multi-site model definitions. Contra Schaller especially, but also Easum and Travis, Harrison clearly names and defines models succinctly.

Harrison's model typology does have weaknesses as well. First, and probably most significantly, to a large degree his models emerge from second hand research presented at a conference. Harrison has had experience with multi-site churches and his other research demonstrates high quality, so there is no reason to downplay or disregard his work here. At the same time, compared to multi-site observers highlighted above, Harrison has a far more limited background in and knowledge of multi-site churches. Second, Harrison's model definitions give nothing more than brief explanation. He gives no research verification or citation to back his claims, nor does he provide actual examples of churches employing the different model types. These two factors limit the extent of his contribution.

Harrison's multi-site models, combined with those of Schaller, Easum and Travis, Surratt, Ligon, and Bird, together provide a suitable starting point for identifying both common models and methodologies of multi-site churches. These classifications, however, are relatively brief and limited. A broader treatment of multi-site typology is needed to better analyze and assess the breadth of multi-site church approaches, models, expressions, and methodologies. This type of treatment is the focus of the next section.

Formulating a Multi-site Church Taxonomy

While a complete formulation of multi-site models may be possible in the future, presently it remains difficult if not impossible. Both the fluidity and relative novelty of the multi-site movement prevent a comprehensive categorization of existing multi-site church models.³⁶ What is available, however, is a recognizable set of multi-site church characteristics that when identified and systematized can provide a multi-site church taxonomy.

Three key characteristics of the multi-site church phenomenon are well suited for taxonomy: (1) proximity of sites, (2) preaching methodology, and (3) process of multi-siting. While arguably other attributes of multi-site churches could be used for classification, these three general categories provide the most fitting entry point for understanding and analyzing multi-site churches. The resulting taxonomy is both concise and comprehensive, yet it grants flexibility for further development as multi-site forms and patterns become more distinguishable.

In the pages to follow, the three multi-site characteristics above will be introduced, defined, and explained. First, with each characteristic a key question will be asked and answered that will introduce the specific multi-site attribute and that will render the major possible responses to the question. Following the key question under each multi-site characteristic, a table will be presented highlighting the possible responses (or approaches) to the multi-site category question. Each response within the section table will be explained briefly, and examples of churches using various approaches will be treated as appropriate.

³⁶Surratt, Ligon, and Bird, *The Multi-Site Church Revolution*, 41.

Before moving forward, one final note of explanation is important. Within this taxonomy, a multi-site church is not limited to one specific multi-site designation. In some cases, multi-site churches will fit neatly into a single category description. In other cases, a church may fit within or occupy two or more multi-site characteristic classifications. Thus, unlike antecedent multi-site classifications systems that generally identified each church within a single multi-site category label, this taxonomy allows for multiple classifications as various multi-site arrangements warrant.

Characteristic 1: Proximity of Multi-site Location

In a 2004 article entitled, “Launch Factors: When to Start *Your* Next Venue or Site,” Warren Bird highlights a key characteristic of multi-site churches: how churches relate to distance. Bird says, “In short, *multi-site* [emphasis original] summarizes today’s approach to church where geography is no longer the defining factor.”³⁷ As seen in chapter 1, distance barriers historically limited the geographic limits of a church’s life and ministry. While various forms of historic multi-site ministries attempted to overcome distance, these approaches could not extend a single church to multiple locations over increasingly expanded distances because of the travel constraints (e.g., lack of roads and a highway system and vehicle costs). Clearly, multi-site churches and the multi-site church movement have not negated distance barriers, but they have (due to technological advances) dramatically minimized the impact of distance. How multi-site churches relate to distance in their multi-site structure is thus the first consideration in

³⁷Warren Bird, “Launch Factors: When to Start Your Next Venue or Site,” Leadership Network, 2004, 3.

categorizing multi-site churches.

The key question in categorizing how multi-site churches relate to geography and distance is: “What is the proximity between worship gatherings or campus locations?” Figure 1 (below) provides six answers to this question. Of the six classifications listed, two of them, “multiple services” and “internet campuses,” are included within the figure, but are not multiple-site expressions per se.³⁸ They will not receive further consideration within this study, but should be recognized as beginning and ending points on the scale of multi-site proximity.

³⁸For some, the idea of multiple services being a multi-site expression may seem inconsistent, but as Charles Arn points out pensively, “the movement between a multiple service approach to a multi-site approach is miniscule.” Charles Arn, interview by author, telephone conversation, 14 September 2010. At the opposite end of the continuum, some may doubt the reality or importance of the Internet campus concept. In terms of multi-site application, an Internet campus is often considered an additional site of a multi-site church. In terms of the continuum above, an Internet campus is easily located as the end of the proximity continuum because it is a supra-geographic extension of a multi-site church. For a brief introduction to the Internet campus concept, see “Internet Campuses—Virtual or Reality?” chapter in Surratt, Ligon, and Bird, *A Multi-site Church Roadtrip*, 84-100. For a more expansive treatment of “virtual church” considerations, see Douglas Estes, *SimChurch: Being the Church in the Virtual World* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2009). See also, Craig Von Buseck, *Unleashing the Internet to Make Fishers of Men* (Nashville: B&H, 2010).

According to Leadership Network (November 2009), there were over forty churches with Internet campuses. These include Life Church (Edmond, OK); Seacoast Church (Charleston, SC); Flamingo Road Church (Cooper City, FL); McLean Bible Church (metro Washington DC); New Hope Christian Fellowship (Oahu, HI); The Church Group (Jacksonville FL); Christ Fellowship (Palm Beach Gardens, FL); Richmond Community Church (Richmond, VA); Northland, A Church Distributed (Orlando, FL); Victory Life Family Worship Center (Durant, OK); Gracepoint Church (Wichita, KS); Brand New Church (Harrison, AR); Central Christian Church (Las Vegas, NV); Mecklenburg Community Church (Charlotte, NC); Pine Ridge Church (Graham, NC); Celebration Church (Jacksonville, FL); NewSong Church (Irvine, CA); Alive Church (Tucson, AZ); Liquid Church (Morristown, NJ); NewSpring Church (Anderson, SC); Voice to the Nations (Griffin, GA); The Ridge Community Church (Oak Ridge, TN); Barefoot Church (Myrtle Beach, SC); Saddleback Church (Lake Forest, CA); Forefront Church (Denver, CO); Real Life Fellowship (Corpus Christi, TX); The Church at South Las Vegas (Las Vegas, NV); Church of the Resurrection (Kansas City, MO); Faith Promise Church (Knoxville, TN); Journey Church (Orange Park, FL); Buckhead Church (Atlanta, GA); Healing Place Church (Baton Rouge, LA); Southbrook Community Church (Charlotte, NC); The Church at Chapel Hill (Douglasville, GA); Abundant Life Church (Blaine, MN); Discovery Church (Orlando, FL); Elevation Church (Matthews, NC); Table Rock Fellowship (Medford, OR); Community Bible Church (Stockbridge, GA); Granger Community Church (Fort Bend, IN); Woodlands Church (The Woodlands, TX); Celebration Covenant Church (Frisco, TX); Gateway Church (Austin, TX); Cross Timbers Church (Argyle, TX); and Generate at Crossroads Church (Corona, CA). “Churches with an Internet Campus,” Leadership Network [on-line]; accessed 22 December 2009; available from <http://digital.leadnet.org/2007/10/index.html>; Internet.

Proximity	Multiple Services	<i>Multiple Venues</i>	Localized Multi-sites	<i>Regional Multi-sites</i>	<i>Extended Multi-sites</i>	Internet Campuses
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Figure 1. Proximity scale of multi-site location

Much of the work for categorizing multi-site proximity was completed by 2003. In an article written by Bird and Ligon, the authors present a list “Summary List of Multi-site Approaches.”³⁹ Three of the six classifications, noted in italics above, come from their initial list of approaches. The nomenclature of these categories is helpful, so they will be maintained here with some definitional modification.

Multiple venues. The multiple venue approach involves conducting two or more (multiple) services at different venues or sites at the same location (Figure 2). Bird and Ligon describe it laconically as: “One church, with many on-site venues (all on same campus).”⁴⁰

This approach does not include simple overflow or extension rooms. Each venue generally offers a unique musical worship experience and may include varied preaching presentation formats. For example, at Jersey Church, Pataskala, Ohio, three distinct worship services (“Emerge—Modern Rock,” “Gospel Celebration—Southern Gospel,” and “Jersey Live—Contemporary”) occur simultaneously at 9:45 a.m. and 11:00 a.m. each Sunday. A different venue leader runs each of the services, and the three

³⁹Originally, they listed five, including “(A) Multiple-Venue, (B) Regional Multi-Site, (C) Extended Multi-site, (D) Church Planting Multi-Site, and (E) Variations of the Above Themes.” Warren Bird and Greg Ligon, “Extending Your Church to More than One Place: A Field Report on the Emerging Multi-Site Movement,” 9. Three years later, Bird and Ligon revised their initial categories creating the five multi-site models found in *The Multi-Site Church Revolution*. Surratt, Ligon, and Bird, *Multi-Site Church Revolution*, 26-44.

venues function with independent worship leaders leading with a specific worship style.

Multiple Venues
<p style="text-align: center;">Definition:</p> <p style="text-align: center;">One church with two or more (multiple) services at a single venue or multiple venues at one location (same campus)</p>
<p style="text-align: center;">Examples:</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Jersey Baptist Church, Pataskala (Columbus), Ohio North Coast Church, Vista, California Saddleback Church, Lake Forest, California Community Christian Church, Naperville (Chicago), Illinois</p>

Figure 2. Multiple venues summary

At a designated time, all worship services transition to a sermon preached live in one venue and simulcast to the others. This model closely mirrors the multi-venue approach of Fellowship Bible Church, Little Rock, Arkansas, with their worship center, Edge, and Chapel venues.⁴¹

Multiple venues are not limited to a sermon simulcast. Within the multiple venue arrangement, recorded sermons may be used at different venues and at different times. For example, for a time Community Christian Church, Naperville, Illinois, used pre-recorded video during an afternoon worship service on their main campus. Using the same room used for an earlier Sunday service, they converted the room to a coffee shop, discussion-based venue for an afternoon worship service. Saddleback Church, Lake Forest, California has a “Terrace Café” venue offering “a perfect place for fellowship and

⁴¹“Worship,” Fellowship Bible Church [on-line]; accessed 15 September 2010; available from <http://www.fellowshiponline.com/ministries/worship/>; Internet.

a casual worship experience.” Sunday evenings at 5:00 p.m., the church also offers the “Fuel” venue with a “live” preacher that runs concurrent with another live speaker at the large Saddleback “Worship Center Venue.”⁴²

North Coast Church, Vista, California, offers the most well developed and extensive multiple venue model. Each Sunday the church offers twelve unique worship venues combining for nineteen total worship services.⁴³

Localized multi-sites. The localized multi-site approach involves one church with two or more campuses focused on a limited geographical region (Figure 3). Generally, churches within this proximity category focus on a single city or a limited part of a region. Long Hollow Baptist Church, for example, based in Hendersonville, Tennessee, utilizes campuses in Hendersonville, Gallatin, and White House to reach a

⁴²“Service Times and Directions,” Saddleback Church [on-line]; accessed 15 September 2010; available from <http://www.saddleback.com/lakeforest/aboutus/servicetimesanddirections/>; Internet.

⁴³The North Coast Website offers the following worship service options: (1) North Coast Live: Our original venue with a full worship band and live teaching in the main auditorium. Sat 5:30PM; Sun 9:00 AM; Sun 11:00 AM; (2) Video Cafe: Contemporary gospel worship, Starbucks coffee, pastries, and message via big screen video. Sat 5:30 PM; Sun 9:00 AM; 11:00 AM; (3) The Edge: An edgier atmosphere with big subwoofers and the same message via big screen video. Sat 5:30 PM; Sun 9:00 AM; 11:00 AM; (4) Live @ 12:45: Our newest service with full worship band and live teaching in Live. Sun 12:45 PM; (5) Country Gospel: Featuring gospel/bluegrass worship, Starbucks and cookies, with the message via big screen video. Meets in The Chapel Sat 5:30 PM; (6) Frontline: This full service venue caters to our military personnel and features a coffeehouse feel with acoustic worship. Sat @ 5:30 PM in The Corner Café; (7) Early Bird Cafe: Starbucks coffee, pastries, and full band worship in Video Cafe with the message via big screen video. Meets in Video Cafe Sun 7:30 AM; (8) Traditions: A mix of classic hymns, old favorites, and contemporary worship. Starbucks and pastries, with the message via big screen video. Sun 9:00 AM in The Chapel; (9) The Message: Simply the message. Join us in The Corner Cafe for a relaxed, coffeehouse atmosphere with a made-to-order coffee bar and the message on flat screens. Sun 9:00 & 11:00 AM; (10) Sunday Night ENCORE: Features high powered worship in Live with the message via big screen video. Sun 5:30 PM; (11) Encore 4 Singles: A video venue sponsored by our Singles Ministry. Starbucks, cookies, full band worship with the message via big screen video. Meets in Video Cafe. Sun 5:30 PM; and (12) Last Call: A video venue featuring a combo of high energy and reflective worship with the message via big screen video. Meets in The Edge. Sun 5:30 PM. “Worship Times, Styles & Options: Main Campus,” North Coast Church [on-line]; accessed 15 September 2010; available from http://www.northcoastchurch.com/welcome/main_campus/worship_options/; Internet.

limited area Northwest of Nashville.⁴⁴ Cedar Creek Church of Perrysburg, Ohio operates a local campus in their Toledo suburb, a second in the city of Toledo, and third campus in Whitehouse, a rural community twenty minutes to the west of Perrysburg.⁴⁵ Even with only three campuses, their worship programming is extensive, offering a combined fifteen services each weekend.

Localized Multi-sites
<p style="text-align: center;">Definition:</p> <p style="text-align: center;">One church with two or more campuses focused on a limited geographical area</p>
<p style="text-align: center;">Examples:</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Bethlehem Baptist Church, Minneapolis, Minnesota Long Hollow Baptist Church, Hendersonville, Tennessee Cedar Creek Church, Perrysburg (Toledo), Ohio Highview Baptist Church, Louisville, Kentucky New Life Community Church, Chicago, Illinois</p>

Figure 3. Localized multi-sites summary

Bethlehem Baptist Church focuses its ministry efforts across three campuses in the Twin Cities, Minnesota area, with a North, Downtown, and South campus arranged along the 27 miles of Interstate 35 West corridor.⁴⁶ Another, larger example of a localized multi-site church is Highview Baptist Church, Louisville, Kentucky. Highview

⁴⁴“Welcome to Long Hollow,” Long Hollow Baptist Church [on-line]; accessed 19 September 2010; available from http://www.longhollow.com/im_new; Internet.

⁴⁵“Service Times & Locations,” Cedar Creek Church [on-line]; accessed 18 September 2010; available from <http://cedarcreek.tv/WelcomeCenter/TimesLocations/tabid/86/Default.aspx>; Internet.

⁴⁶“Welcome to Bethlehem,” Bethlehem Baptist Church [on-line]; accessed 18 September 2010; available from <http://www.hopeingod.org/>; Internet.

operates with six campuses across Louisville metropolitan area including two niche campuses: one Hispanic site and another site focused on the University of Louisville campus.⁴⁷ A final example is New Life Community Church, in Chicago, Illinois. New Life offers 14 different worship sites with 28 worship services, and eight of the services are in Spanish.⁴⁸

Regional multi-sites. Regional multi-sites move beyond the focus of a single metropolitan area to a region often including several metropolitan nodes. In short, a regional multi-site church is one church with multiple sites positioned throughout a region (Figure 4). On the fringe of the regional multi-site category is National Community Church, in Washington, D.C. With only six sites, five of which gather in theaters and the sixth in a coffee house, National Community Church facilitates three sites in Washington, DC, two in Alexandria, Virginia, and a last in Arlington, Virginia.⁴⁹ Mosaic Church in Los Angeles, California provides a similar urban example of a regional multi-site church, but on a larger scale. Mosaic's eight sites span Southern California, stretching from San Diego in the south to Berkeley (San Francisco) in the north and from Chino in the east to the Redondo Beach on the West coast.⁵⁰

⁴⁷“Service Times & Locations,” Highview Baptist Church [on-line]; accessed 19 September 2010; available from <http://www.highview.org/imnew/servicetimeslocations/>; Internet.

⁴⁸“Location Map & Service Hours,” New Life Church; accessed 20 September 2010; available from <http://www.newlifechicago.mobi/Main/default.aspx?showMap=true>; Internet.

⁴⁹“Locations & Directions: NCC is one church, five locations,” National Community Church [on-line]; accessed 20 September 2010; available from <http://theaterchurch.com/location>; Internet.

⁵⁰“Gatherings,” Mosaic [on-line]; accessed 20 September 2010; available from <http://mosaic.org/Gatherings/>; Internet.

Regional Multi-sites
<p>Definition: One church with multiple sites positioned throughout a region</p>
<p>Examples: National Community Church, Washington, DC Mosaic Church, Los Angeles, California Church of the Highlands, Birmingham, Alabama Mars Hill Church, Seattle, Washington</p>

Figure 4. Regional multi-sites summary

Regional multi-sites, however, are not only visible within highly urbanized areas. Church of the Highlands in Birmingham, Alabama, locates its seven campuses in two of Alabama's principal cities, Birmingham and Montgomery, in addition to Pelham and the university towns of Auburn and Tuscaloosa.⁵¹ A final example is Mars Hill Church, Seattle, Washington. Mars Hill operates nine combined sites, six of which are concentrated in the Seattle metropolitan area. The seventh and eighth sites extend from Seattle into Auburn and Olympia.⁵² Presently, Mars Hill is on the verge of transitioning beyond the regional multi-site designation to the next proximity classification. Their final site is located in Albuquerque, New Mexico, 1,445 miles away from the church's administrative offices.⁵³

The regional multi-site category is the most fluid of the six proximity

⁵¹“Campuses,” Church of the Highlands [on-line]; accessed 19 September 2010; available from <http://churchofthehighlands.com/campuses>; Internet.

⁵²“Locations and Services,” Mars Hill Church [on-line]; accessed 20 September 2010; available from http://www.marshillchurch.org/locations_and_services; Internet.

⁵³“Welcome to Mars Hill Church Albuquerque,” Mars Hill Church – Albuquerque Campus [on-line]; accessed 10 November 2010; available from <http://albuquerque.marshillchurch.org/newhere/>; Internet.

classifications because as multi-sites transition beyond a localized focus, the geographical boundaries become less of a barrier in organizational extension. This issue becomes more easily understood when appraising the next multi-site classification.

Extended multi-sites. This final multi-site proximity classification is not limited to geographic boundaries. It centers on one church with multiple sites extending beyond a single region traversing multiple regions, states, nations, or some combination of the three.

The following four examples of extended multi-sites demonstrate the expanding and expansive nature of extended multi-site churches. The first is Seacoast Community Church, Mount Pleasant, South Carolina. Seacoast began in Mount Pleasant and became a localized multi-site church in 2003 with video campuses in (1) Charleston, (2) West Ashley, and (3) Columbia, South Carolina. While in some respects Seacoast became both a localized and regional multi-site church simultaneously, by 2004 they clearly became a regional multi-site church adding campuses in Greenville and Summerville, South Carolina, and Savannah, Georgia. Presently (2010), Seacoast operates with twelve campuses within South Carolina, North Carolina, and Georgia (Figure 5).⁵⁴

⁵⁴Seacoast campuses are located in the following locations: Columbia, SC (two sites in same city); Simpsonville, SC; Charleston, SC (two sites in same city); Manning, SC; Mount Pleasant, SC; North Charleston, SC; Summerville, SC; Asheville, NC; Greensboro, NC; and Savannah, GA. "I'm A Regular (Choose A Campus)," Seacoast Church [on-line]; accessed 18 September 2010; available from <http://www.seacoast.org/>; Internet.

Extended Multi-sites
<p>Definition:</p> <p>One church with many sites extending beyond a single region traversing multiple regions, states, or some combination of the three.</p>
<p>Examples:</p> <p>Seacoast Community Church, Mount Pleasant, South Carolina LifeChurch.tv, Edmond (Oklahoma City), Oklahoma Christ the King Community Church, Mount Vernon, Washington New Hope Church, Honolulu, Hawaii</p>

Figure 5. Extended multi-sites summary

In a similar way, LifeChurch.tv functions with nine campuses in Oklahoma with another site, the Fort Worth, Texas campus in an adjacent state.⁵⁵ Unlike Seacoast (regionalized only in the southeast), LifeChurch.tv extends well beyond a single region (the southwest) with campuses in Albany, New York, Hendersonville, Tennessee, and Wellington, Florida.⁵⁶

While their interstate multi-site arrangement may test one's thinking about the geographic boundaries of a single church, LifeChurch.tv has not ventured as far as others. The base of Christ the King Community Church (CTK) is 60 miles north of Seattle, Washington, in Mount Vernon, Washington. By 2003, CTK "sponsored 13 services on 7 campuses each in a different city . . . [using] three different languages."⁵⁷ At present,

⁵⁵LifeChurch.tv's Oklahoma campuses include (1) Edmond, (2) Yukon, (3) Northwest Oklahoma City, (4) Oklahoma City, (5) Owasso, (6) South Oklahoma City, (7) Stillwater, (8) Tulsa, and (9) South Tulsa. "Locations & Times," LifeChurch.tv [on-line]; accessed 18 September 2010; available from <http://www.lifechurch.tv/locations/church-online>; Internet.

⁵⁶Ibid.,

⁵⁷Bird and Ligon, "Extending Your Church to More than One Place," 8.

CTK sponsors 19 campuses throughout Washington, two in Oregon, two in Colorado, two in British Columbia, Canada, individual campuses in Florida and Idaho, and international, national-led branches in India, Kenya, Pakistan, and South Africa.⁵⁸

New Hope Church, Honolulu, Hawaii, is likely the most extensive extended multi-site church in North America. Throughout the Hawaiian Islands alone, New Hope presently sustains 28 campuses. On the American mainland, they have six sites in the Western United States, and internationally New Hope operates eight additional sites in Japan, Nepal, and Australia, and several undisclosed locations.⁵⁹ Altogether, this

⁵⁸CTK's Washington sites include (1) Anacortes, WA; (2) Arlington, WA; (3) Bellingham, WA; (4) Blaine, WA; (5) Burlington, WA; (6) Coupeville, WA; (7) Everson, WA; (8) Ferndale, WA; (9) Friday Harbor, WA; (10) Kendall, WA; (11) La Conner, WA; (12) Lake Stevens, WA; (13) Lopez Island, WA; (14) Lynden, WA; (15) Lynnwood, WA; (16) Mount Vernon, WA; (17) Oak Harbor, WA; (18) Rockport, WA; (19) Sedro Woolley, WA; (20) Black Hawk, CO; (21) Durango, CO; (22) Nampa, ID; (23) Port Orange, FL; (24) Canby, OR; (25) Silver Lake, OR; (26) Abbotsford, B.C., Canada; (27) Gibsons, B.C., Canada; (28) India; (29) Kenya; (30) Pakistan; and (31) South Africa. "Quick links to worship centers," Christ the King Community Church International [on-line]; accessed 16 September 2010; available from http://www.ctkonline.com/pages/page.asp?page_id=44128; Internet.

Warren Bird gives helpful explanation on CTK international campuses. Bird explains, "Christ the King's international campuses are connected more through partnership of values than through the week-to-week teaching. Its Nepal campuses are legally registered as Christ the King Relief and Development Services. The campuses worship God, are able to do good works in their communities, and are legally able to receive donations from outside the country. They translate funding into physical expressions (food, clothing, etc.) of Christ's love. In South Africa, Christ the King exists mainly in the form of cell groups. Over seven hundred small groups, representing about eight thousand people, meet regularly. Most of the church life in South Africa currently occurs through these cells rather than through large worship.

Christ the King's international leaders gather annually, in person at its original location in Mount Vernon [Seattle], for a time of fellowship and planning. Throughout the year, they remain in regular contact with the original campus and one another through email, the church's website, and phone calls." Geoff Surratt, Greg Ligon, and Warren Bird, *A Multi-site Church Roadtrip: Exploring the New Normal* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2009), 132-33.

⁵⁹The following comprehensive list of 46 sites and locations connected with New Hope Church comes from the church website (1) New Hope Oahu at Honolulu, Honolulu, HI; (2) New Hope Oahu at Aiea, Aiea, HI; (3) New Hope Oahu at Kai, Honolulu, HI; (4) New Hope Oahu at Manoa, Honolulu, HI; (5) New Hope Oahu at Sand Island, Honolulu, HI; (6) New Hope Oahu at South Shore, Honolulu, HI; (7) New Hope Oahu at West Oahu, Waianae, HI; (8) New Hope Oahu East Shore, Kailua, HI; (9) New Hope Central Oahu, Mililani, HI; (10) New Hope Windward, Kaneohe, HI; (11) New Hope Okinawa, Nakagamigun, Okinawa; (12) New Hope Wahiawa, Wahiawa, HI; (13) New Hope Waimea, Kamuela, HI; (14) New Hope Volcano, Volcano, HI; (15) New Hope Puna, Pahoehoe, HI; (16) New Hope Pearl Community, Pearl City, HI; (17) New Hope Maui, Wailuku, HI; (18) New Hope Keaau, Keaau, HI; (19) New Hope Kailua, Kailua, HI; (20) New Hope Hamakua, Papaikou, HI; (21) New Hope East HI, Keaau, HI; (22) New Hope at

extended multi-site church locates 48 campuses and “New Hope International” partner churches around the Pacific Rim.⁶⁰

Characteristic 2: Multi-location Preaching

Multi-site church leaders employ a variety of mechanisms for developing and delivering sermons for weekly corporate worship gatherings. When seeking to assess the various preaching approaches generally used by multi-site churches, the key question to ask is: “How would you describe your preaching preparation and practice as it relates to multi-site corporate gatherings?” For the purpose of taxonomy, these responses may be grouped into five different classifications. These classifications are as follows: (1) rover approach, (2) rotation approach, (3) collaborative approach, (4) video approach, and (5) proxy approach (Figure 6).⁶¹

the Crossroads, Hilo, HI; (23) New Hope Leeward, Waipahu, HI; (24) New Hope Hilo, Hilo, HI; (25) New Hope Lihue, Lihue, HI; (26) New Hope Kaua’i, Kapaa, HI; (27) New Hope Kapolei, Kapolei, HI; and (28) New Hope Diamond Head, Honolulu, HI. Six sites are within the continental United States: (29) New Hope Chapel, Los Angeles, CA; (30) New Hope Simi Valley, Simi Valley, CA; (31) New Hope South Bay, Torrance, CA; (32) New Hope Seattle, Shoreline, WA; (33) New Hope Las Vegas, Las Vegas, NV; and (34) New Hope Missoula, Missoula, MT. Eight sites are outside the United States: (35) New Hope Yokohama, Naka-ku, Yokohama; (36) New Hope Sapporo, Teine-ku, Sapporo; (37) New Hope Chiba, Yachiyodaiminami, Chiba; (38) New Hope Nepal; (39) New Hope Okinawa; (40) New Hope Osaka; (41) New Hope Tokyo; and (42) New Hope Brisbane, Red Hill, Brisbane, Australia. Six additional international congregations either do not bear the “New Hope” brand in their name and a few operate as an NHI (New Hope International) Partners: (43) J-House Osaka (44) New Hope Narimasu Satellite Church, Waseda, Shinkuku; (45) Church of Glory Kichijoji (NHI Partner); (46) Shalom Christian Fellowship (NHI Partner), Shinjuku, Shinkuku; (47) Shinjuku Shalom (NHI Partner), Shinjuku, Shinkuku; and (48) New Life Family Church, Iruma-shi, Narimasu. “Find a New Hope Location near You.” New Hope Church [on-line]; accessed September 16 2010; available from <http://www.enewhope.org/index.php/locations/>; Internet.

⁶⁰For further discussion on international multi-site churches, their campuses, and implications, see “Going Global,” chap. 4 of Surratt, Ligon, and Bird, *A Multi-site Church Roadtrip*, 129-45.

⁶¹It is important to note that “the collaborative approach” deals more with the sermon preparation process than with the process of sermon delivery. At the same time, the collaborative process yields a unique type of preaching arrangement in that it allows its users to utilize sermons, preachers (both live and video) interchangeably across the campuses of a multi-site church. In light of this reality, it is included here for consideration.

Preaching	Rover Approach	Rotation Approach	Collaborative Approach	Video Approach	Proxy Approach
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Figure 6. Multi-location preaching approaches

Based on the key question, one could assume that each approach has a unique process involved in sermon creation and delivery. This understanding would be inaccurate. The question does not provide the classification; rather, the answers demonstrate patterns that aid classification. In some cases both the process of preparation and the method by which the sermon is delivered contribute to the preaching approach, while in others only the way preaching is conducted over various locations is important to assessing the preaching component of multi-site taxonomy. With this caveat acknowledged, it is now appropriate to evaluate the five approaches.

Rover approach. The term “rover” carries with it the notion of movement from place to place. In terms of ministry within American history, the Methodist circuit-riding concept would be a clear example of a roving approach to ministry, i.e., one individual moving from place to place to preach. J. Frank Norris and his tandem pastorates in Fort Worth, Texas, and Detroit, Michigan would be another example of one individual traveling from ministry site to site to do sermon delivery. Numerous other examples of roving preachers may be cited, and it is important to note that a roving approach to preaching is not unique to multi-site ministries. At the same time, it is clear that the roving approach was the earliest in multi-site practice and that it facilitated the dawn of the multi-site church movement (Figure 7).

Rover Approach
<p>Definition: A single individual traveling between two or more locations to preach during a weekend, especially during the Sunday morning hours</p>
<p>Examples: Scott Memorial Baptist Church, San Diego, California Perimeter Church, Atlanta, Georgia Church on the Way, Van Nuys, California First Community Church, Columbus, Ohio</p>

Figure 7. Rover preaching approach summary

In relation to the multi-site church concept, the rover approach may be defined as a single individual traveling between two or more locations to preach during a weekend, especially during the Sunday morning hours. Documented examples of the rover approach are well established. In the 1970s, when Tim LaHaye pastored Scott Memorial Baptist Church, San Diego, California, each week LaHaye roved between the Scott East and Scott West campus to preach.⁶² When Randy Pope led Perimeter Church, Atlanta, Georgia, to begin their second location in 1980, he roved between two sites to preach. As Pope chronicles:

Within two years of beginning Perimeter Church, we felt it was time to birth a second congregation that we called ‘Perimeter West.’ I preached an early service at our original location, left before the service had ended, drove approximately ten miles to our new congregation, and walked in just in time to preach. Then, before that service was complete, I was back into my car and drove back to our original congregation, once again, just in time to preach in the second service.⁶³

⁶²Gary L. McIntosh, *Make Room for the Boom . . . or Bust: Six Models for Reaching Three Generations* (Grand Rapids: Fleming H. Revel, 1997), 139.

⁶³Randy Pope, *The Prevailing Church: An Alternative Approach to Ministry* (Chicago: Moody, 2002), 127.

In 1987, while pastoring Mount Paran Church of God, Atlanta, Georgia, Paul Walker led his congregation to become “one church in two locations” by acquiring the properties and facilities of Marietta Baptist Temple. Walker traveled the 14.5 miles of expressway each week to preach at both locations.⁶⁴ In a similar way, in 1989 Jack Hayford and the people of Church on the Way, Van Nuys, California, accepted an offer from Jess Moody, pastor of First Baptist Church, Van Nuys, to acquire the First Baptist’s buildings and property. As a result, Church on the Way utilized the additional property as a second site, and Hayford roved the quarter mile between two campuses each Sunday morning to preach multiple services.⁶⁵ Finally, First Community Church, Columbus, Ohio, began using the rover approach in 1991 to accommodate a plan to both refurbish and strengthen their existing site and to extend their congregation to a new location.⁶⁶

Rotation approach. The primary demarcation between the rover approach and the rotation approach to multi-site preaching is the movement from a singular teacher to a plurality of teachers in the preaching process. The rotation approach then may be defined as two or more (multiple) individuals regularly preaching at the various locations of a multi-site church. The rotation approach would not include a simple teaching team approach where a few individuals preach at a central location and sermons are relayed via simulcast or video recording to another site. Neither would the occasional guest or staff speaker preaching during the primary teacher’s absence qualify within this category. The

⁶⁴Towns, *10 of Today’s Most Innovative Churches*, 166-67.

⁶⁵*Ibid.*, 72.

⁶⁶Schaller, *Innovations in Ministry*, 126-27.

rotation approach entails the existence of a team of teachers who travel between multiple sites to deliver in-person preaching (Figure 8).

Rotation Approach
<p>Definition: Two or more (multiple) individuals regularly preaching at the various locations of a multi-site church</p>
<p>Examples: Community Christian Church, Naperville (Chicago), Illinois First Baptist Church Windermere, Windermere, Florida Valley Bible Fellowship Church, Bakersfield, California Celebration Church, Jacksonville, Florida Harvest Bible Chapel, Rolling Meadows, Illinois Oasis Church, Pembroke Pines, Florida</p>

Figure 8. Rotation preaching approach summary

In *Multi-Site Church Revolution*, Surratt, Ligon, and Bird, include this rotation approach as subset of the “Teaching Team Model.” They explain:

Many multi-site churches feature on-site preaching delivered by a team of teaching pastors. Most of those have one regular pastor for each site. Other churches have their pastors rotate between sites: Pastor Smith preaches one week at Trinity West, the next week at Trinity East, and the next week at Trinity South. When the preachers rotate, a second person—a campus pastor—is usually based at the extension site so that the people have the same ‘face with the place’ each week.⁶⁷

Schaller also draws attention to the rotation approach, albeit in somewhat of a theoretical fashion: “In a typical arrangement, the senior minister preaches in one of the two small congregations on alternate Sundays as well as in the town church on Sunday morning, while the associate (who may be licensed but not ordained) preaches at the

⁶⁷Surratt, Ligon, and Bird, *The Multi-Site Church Revolution*, 37.

early service in town and alternates between the two small churches.”⁶⁸

The pioneering innovators of this rotation approach are the teaching team at Community Christian Church, in Naperville, Illinois. Within this preaching matrix, the congregation does not know which teaching member team will be preaching at their various sites from week to week. Any one of the teachers, including lead pastor, Dave Ferguson, his brother Jon, and Tim Sutherland among others, may appear in person or in video at any site to teach on any given weekend.⁶⁹ At least for a time, First Baptist Church of Windermere, Florida, used a similar process, but operated with a lead pastor and two campus pastors who shared preaching responsibilities across their three campuses.⁷⁰

In *Multi-site Churches*, author Scott McConnell cites the rotation approach used at Valley Bible Fellowship as perhaps the most distant example of a multi-site rotating team:

Valley Bible Fellowship uses rotation and has utilized two primary teachers, senior pastor Ron Vietti and teaching pastor Jim Crews. VBF has had campuses in Bakersfield, California, and Las Vegas, Nevada, for several years in which Vietti or Crews preached live at most services despite the 270 miles separating the campuses. More recently, VBF has added theatre campuses in Visalia and Reno. Instead of both teachers preaching the same content on the same week, Vietti and Crews each choose half of the sermons in a series and concentrate on preaching those. They preached those two sermons in one live location and then they swap and preach the same two sermons in the other city.⁷¹

⁶⁸Schaller, *Innovations in Ministry*, 121.

⁶⁹Surratt, Ligon, and Bird, *The Multi-Site Church Revolution*, 37.

⁷⁰Ibid; see also Charles T. Carter, “An Analysis of the Multi-Campus Approach of Local Church Ministry Utilizing First Baptist Church of Windermere, Florida, as a Paradigmatic Model” (D.Min. project., The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2005).

⁷¹McConnell, *Multi-site Churches*, 85.

Other examples of churches using the rotation approach include (1) Celebration Church, Jacksonville, Florida, (2) Harvest Bible Chapel, Rolling Meadows, Illinois, and (3) Oasis Church, Pembroke Pines, Florida.⁷²

Collaborative approach. In both the rover and rotation approaches, the definition of each centers upon the delivery of sermons to multiple locations. The focus of the collaborative approach, however, deals primarily with the process of sermon creation, rather than upon the method of sermon delivery. As the title would suggest, the collaborative approach is defined as follows: multiple individuals contribute to the creation of sermons delivered at the various locations of a multi-site church (Figure 9).

Collaborative Approach
<p>Definition: Multiple individuals contribute to the creation of sermons delivered at the various locations of a multi-site church</p>
<p>Examples: Community Christian Church, Naperville (Chicago), Illinois Highview Baptist Church, Louisville, Kentucky New Life Community Church, Chicago, IL</p>

Figure 9. Collaborative preaching approach summary

Collaboration or the process of cooperating toward a common goal can be highly intensive, very limited in nature, or it can fall somewhere between these two extremes. Two examples of the collaborative approach demonstrate what some may consider to be at opposite ends of the cooperation spectrum. In this taxonomy, they will be labeled full

⁷²Ibid., 83-85.

collaboration and limited collaboration respectively.

Community Christian Church, Naperville, Illinois again provides a key multi-site innovation in their *full collaboration* approach to preaching. In addition to using a rotating team of teachers, they developed a unique form of sermon preparation centered on what they call “The Big Idea” concept. In their work, *The Big Idea: Aligning the Ministries of Your Church through Creative Collaboration*, authors Dave Ferguson, Jon Ferguson, and Eric Bramlett present a comprehensive communication strategy that tunes nearly all facets of weekly communication around a singular theme (“The Big Idea”).⁷³ Each week, the sermon, worship presentation, small groups focus, and segment ministries direction, e.g., children’s ministry, concentrate on a key Scriptural directive system-wide.

Grounding their “big idea” is a sermon creation process that utilizes and maximizes the combined skills of the full Community Christian Church teaching team. On a weekly basis, the team gathers for 105 minutes “to come up with a text, and introduction, an outline, and a conclusion with solid application.”⁷⁴ Within 24 hours of that meeting, teaching team leader Tim Sutherland aggregates notes and materials from that meeting, and team members begin developing their assigned sermon components. Seventeen days before the weekend the sermon will be preached, team members submit their contributions to the teaching team leader. Within another 24 hours, he again aggregates the sermon components and sends them back to the team so that the teacher

⁷³Dave Ferguson, Jon Ferguson, and Eric Bramlett, *The Big Idea: Aligning the Ministries of Your Church through Creative Collaboration* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2007). The original release title was *The Big Idea: Focus the Message, Multiply the Impact*.

⁷⁴*Ibid.*, 148. The authors present the steps, structure, and timing of their teaching team meeting as follows: (1) focus (5 minutes), (2) desired outcomes (10 minutes), (3) brainstorming (45 minutes), (4) Structure (30 minutes), (5) consensus (10 minutes), and (6) divvy time (5 minutes). *Ibid.*, 148-53.

has sixteen days from the time he receives “version 1.0” until the preaching event.⁷⁵ The authors explain the process and benefits of moving from this point to the final version of the sermon:

With the 1.0 “in the can,” you have time to live with it and apply it to your own life. You have more than two weeks to make it even better—and that’s what always happens. To my knowledge, we have never taught from 1.0 manuscript, but we could. For the next sixteen days emails fly back and forth among the teaching team members as we swap new and improved edits of the 1.0. You might get a 2.0 edit that includes a joke you “just have to use.” And then a 3.0 that eliminates a section that seemed repetitive. A few days later comes a 4.0 with a better conclusion. And then you might receive a 5.0 with minor changes that improves the flow. This part of the collaboration process is totally free-form and spontaneous, and it works! And all along the way, you’ve had total improvement as a part of a team.⁷⁶

On the other end of the collaboration spectrum is Highview Baptist Church, in Louisville, Kentucky. As a multi-site church, Highview Baptist maintains a preaching campus pastor at each of its six campuses. On a weekly basis, the team of Highview campus pastors gathers to work on sermon preparation. Their limited collaboration approach is evidenced by how they collectively develop preaching material. As former lead pastor, Kevin Ezell explains it,

We do two sermon retreats a year, staying 18 months ahead. We meet monthly to look at sermon resources and to look at branding or packaging sermon series. We then meet every Wednesday for two hours to cover the upcoming two weeks. All of our lead pastors are there plus a few others we are cultivating to be senior pastors. We focus on text, topic, and application points so that we are preaching the same general topic system-wide, but we do not go to the point of putting all the materials in outline form.⁷⁷

⁷⁵Ibid., 154-58.

⁷⁶Ibid., 154-55.

⁷⁷Pastor Kevin Ezell of Highview Baptist Church, Louisville, Kentucky, telephone interview by the author, 12 September 2010. On September 14, 2010, Ezell assumed the presidency of the North American Mission Board of the Southern Baptist Convention.

A midpoint between the full and limited collaboration approach is the sermon preparation process of New Life Community Church, Chicago, IL. In their process,

One of the teaching pastors prepares an outline and emails it to the preaching team. Each pastor studies the passage and then they get together on their sermons. The result is the same message taught at eight different locations on Sunday by eight different individuals who preach it in their language of that setting and apply it in that local context.⁷⁸

All three of these collaboration approaches demonstrate a unique dynamic within the multi-site preaching framework. The collective energies and abilities of a team of teachers working together enhance productivity, increase sermon quality, and strengthen site-wide direction and cohesiveness among the church sites.⁷⁹

Video approach. This category can be defined as a preaching approach in which “a church broadcasts live or reproduced video preaching to one or more of its venues or sites” (Figure 10). In his work, *Multi-site Churches*, Scott McConnell provides a comprehensive list of multi-site video approaches. They are as follows:

- Video delivered as live feed
 - Video teaching delivered and shown in real time (a live feed)
 - Video teaching delivered in real-time but played when ready (a live feed with TIVO capability)
- Video delivered as DVD or stored file
 - Video teaching recorded on DVD and delivered to other sites unedited
 - Video teaching recorded on DVD, edited, and delivered to other sites
 - Video teaching played the same week it is recorded
 - Video teaching played a week (or more) after it is recorded
- Live teaching at only one service
- Live teaching at multiple services
- Recording done at one site
- Recording capability at multiple sites
 - One recording site used per service

⁷⁸Bird, “Extending Your Site to More than One Place,” 8.

⁷⁹McConnell, *Multi-site Churches*, 84. See also, “The Challenges of a Teaching Team” and “Benefits of a Teaching Team.” Ferguson, Ferguson, and Bramlett, *The Big Idea*, 159-64.

- Simultaneous recording and real-time delivery of video from multiple sites to multiple sites
- One teaching pastor used on video
- A teaching team taking turns on video⁸⁰

Examples of multi-site and multi-venue churches using the video approach are manifold.⁸¹ North Coast Church, Vista, California, for example, is the most well-known church employing the video-venue approach. A pioneer of the video-venue concept, North Coast Church utilizes a single live preacher each week at their “North Coast Live” to provide preaching campus-wide.⁸² The church broadcasts the preacher’s “live sermon” either simultaneously or in recorded video format to eleven other on-site campus venues for 16 total video-sermon experiences each weekend.⁸³

Seacoast Church, Mount Pleasant, South Carolina, which operates with 12 off-site campuses, records video from live preaching at one campus, burns DVDs of the sermon, and then sends those DVDs (via FedEx) to their other campuses for use the

⁸⁰Ibid., 79. The content and format of this quotation follow the model used by McConnell in his discussion of video approaches. Compare McConnell’s appraisal with, “An Overview of Five Different Approaches Used by Multi-Site Locations” chart in Surratt, Ligon, and Bird, *Multi-Site Church Revolution*, 170-72.

⁸¹For example see (1) North Coast Church, Vista, CA; (2) Cornerstone Community Church, Wildomar, CA; (3) Desert Vineyard Christian Fellowship, Lancaster, CA; (4) LifeBridge Christian Church, Longmont, CO; (5) Willowcreek Community Church, South Barrington (Chicago), IL; (6) Healing Place Church, Baton Rouge, LA; (7) North Point Community Church, Alpharetta (Atlanta), GA; (8) Potter’s House, Dallas, TX; (9) Fellowship Church, Grapevine (Dallas), TX; and (10) Blackhawk Church, Madison, WI.

⁸²Surratt, Ligon, and Bird, *The Multi-Site Church Revolution*, 30-32.

⁸³“Worship Times, Styles & Options: Main Campus,” North Coast Church [on-line]; accessed 16 September 2010; available from http://www.northcoastchurch.com/welcome/main_campus/worship_options/; Internet. Surratt, Ligon, and Bird highlight an interesting reality: “On a typical weekend, two-thirds of [worshippers at North Coast Church] choose to worship at a venue where the sermon is presented via videocast rather than at North Coast Live, which has in-person preaching. More than twenty services are held each weekend, and only three of the services have the preacher in the room; for all other services, the preacher’s message is presented via videocast. Surratt, Ligon, and Bird, *The Multi-Site Church Revolution*, 31. See Surratt, Ligon, and Bird for a summary of North Coast Church’s video venue development. Surratt, Ligon, and Bird, *A Multi-site Church Roadtrip*, 103-04.

ensuing weekend with a one-week delay.⁸⁴ The process has proven both effective and efficient in terms of time, communication, and cost.

Video Approach
<p>Definition: A church broadcasts live or reproduced video preaching to one or more of its venues or sites</p>
<p>Examples: North Coast Church, Vista, California LifeBridge Christian Church, Longmont Colorado Potter's House, Dallas, Texas Fellowship Church, Grapevine (Dallas), Texas Blackhawk Church, Madison, Wisconsin.</p>

Figure 10. Video preaching approach summary

LifeChurch.tv, Edmond, Oklahoma, uses a more expedient approach to video delivery. They distribute their live sermon content through satellite uplink to their campuses in order to conduct preaching simultaneously at each of their locations.⁸⁵ For LifeChurch.tv's leadership, their desire is to maintain consistent direction throughout their entire church family. The simulcast video methodology fosters church-wide alignment in message focus, and it allows for simplification in the communication and distribution of supporting materials such as signage, printed materials, and media supplements.⁸⁶

⁸⁴Ibid., 109.

⁸⁵Ibid.

⁸⁶Ibid., 109-10.

Proxy approach. The proxy approach is likely to be most controversial of the multi-site preaching approaches. While proxy preaching is not limited to multi-site churches, its initial development, quick application, and increasing usage within the multi-site church movement necessitate consideration within an accurate multi-site church taxonomy. The proxy approach may be defined as “a church using video preaching from an outside source for corporate worship gatherings” (Figure 11).

Proxy Approach
<p>Definition: A church using video preaching from an outside source for regular corporate worship gatherings</p>
<p>Examples: Heartland Christian Church, Rockford, Illinois Connexus Community Church, Barrie, Ontario, Canada North Point Community Church, Alpharetta (Atlanta), Georgia LifeChurch.tv, Edmond (Oklahoma City), Oklahoma</p>

Figure 11. Proxy preaching approach summary

One of the most remarkable examples of proxy preaching is found in the growth and development of Heartland Christian Church, Rockford, Illinois. As Surratt, Ligon, and Bird recount,

It all started back in 1998, when Mark Bankord approached Bill Hybels, pastor at Willow Creek [Community Christian Church, South Barrington (Chicago), Illinois], and asked him for permission to use videos of Willow teaching messages as part of a new church plant. “You’re nuts,” Bill replied. But Mark persisted, explaining his passion for getting the best teaching he knew out in front of his friends. He insisted that Bill’s messages would work just as well in Rockford as they did in the Chicago area . . . Mark was a marketplace leader, not a pastor, so he approached his friend and evangelism partner, Doug Thiesen, an ordained pastor and gifted worship leader, and shared his vision. They started the church together, and it turned out that the video approach worked! The church grew year after year, and today they have three campuses In 2008 Heartland Community Church

brought a full-time teaching pastor on-site, so outside video is not used nearly as much today, although some of the off-site campuses still use video teaching from the Rockford campus.⁸⁷

Perhaps Carey Nieuwhof had Heartland Community Church in mind in 2007 when he approached North Point Community Church, Alpharetta (Atlanta), Georgia, with a unique church planting partnership. Nieuwhof asked North Point leaders if he could use video preaching from Andy Stanley to plant a church with two campuses in Barrie and Orillia, Ontario, Canada. North Point Community Church agreed to his proposition, and Nieuwhof launched Connexus Community Church in two movie theatres. In the present arrangement (2009), Nieuwhof “serves as the teaching pastor at Connexus about seventy-five percent of the time, teaching in person at one campus and via video at the other campus. The other twenty-five percent of the time, his most frequent teaching staff is Andy Stanley—via video.”⁸⁸

Connexus is one of twenty “Strategic Partner” churches currently affiliated with North Point Community Church.⁸⁹ It is noteworthy that while Heartland Community Church moved away from external video reliance, the opposite is encouraged if not expected by North Point. On the North Point Partners website, the question is asked, “How much video content do Strategic Partners have to show?” Here is their

⁸⁷Surratt, Ligon, and Bird, *A Multi-site Church Roadtrip*, 153-54.

⁸⁸*Ibid.*, 154.

⁸⁹This partnership is defined as follows: “Strategic Partners are autonomous churches that share the same mission, values and organizational structure as North Point Ministries. Additionally, Strategic Partners aim to implement the North Point ministry model and corresponding strategies. This network is structured to maximize the sharing of best practices and encourage leadership development. Our partners participate in monthly conference calls with other partners and North Point staff, connect with one another through North Point hosted conferences and websites, and receive area specific training through web-based resources and onsite visits. “What are the defining characteristics of a North Point Strategic Partner?” North Point Church [on-line]; accessed 18 September 2010; available from <http://www.northpointpartners.org/faqs.jsp>; Internet.

answer:

Our Strategic Partners show video messages from 33% - 90% of their Sunday services. Most of our pastors elect to show video on an increasing basis, as they experience the benefits of being able to provide relevant, engaging content while increasing their leadership presence throughout their organization.⁹⁰

Seemingly, the intention of North Point is to increase their proxy preaching and leadership in Strategic Partner churches.

A final example of the proxy approach is visible in the “shared communicator resources” of LifeChurch.tv. LifeChurch.tv offers three levels of resourcing: (1) “Open,” (2) “Network,” and (3) “United.”⁹¹ Surratt, Ligon, and Bird give comment on each level:

Open represents the idea that any church anywhere can download any number of free resources LifeChurch.tv posts on its <http://open.lifechurch.tv/> website. The content of the site includes message series artwork, being the videos that can be used to promote a brand series, message outlines, and layered graphic files. To use these resources, churches must agree to a license agreement stating that they will use the content only in a noncommercial manner in an effort to “lead people to become fully devoted followers of Christ.” Churches in the open level also agree to make no association by name to LifeChurch.tv or its resources.

A second level, known as Network, is for churches that want to use LifeChurch.tv video teaching messages in one or more of their weekly worship services. Again, all of the resources are free. Network churches maintain 100% autonomy in all their areas of ministry, including the church leadership, vision, decision-making, and governments, but they also use the tagline “a part of the LifeChurch.tv network” in the promotion and delivery of the weekly message.

The third level . . . is called United. Congregations in this level officially become LifeChurch.tv campuses, part of the core vision of being one church in multiple locations. United campuses become fully aligned, governed, and led by LifeChurch.tv leadership.⁹²

⁹⁰“How much video content do strategic partners have to show?” Ibid.

⁹¹Currently, 94 churches globally are LifeChurch.tv Network Churches. “Where are other Network Churches?” LifeChurch.tv [on-line]; accessed 18 September 2010; available from <http://network.lifechurch.tv/churches.html>; Internet.

⁹²Surratt, Ligon, and Bird, *A Multi-site Church Roadtrip*, 152.

Characteristic 3: Multi-siting Process

Within this section, seven primary multi-site methods will be labeled and introduced (Figure 12). Most of these multi-siting processes come from individual or combined multi-site approaches identified in taxonomies found earlier in this chapter. Thus, the primary task here is assembling the seven processes in order to provide an “apples to apples” comparison of ways churches employ multi-site as a practice. The key question of the multi-siting process is: “How does a church utilize the multi-site concept?” As is the case with other multi-site characteristics, multi-site churches may use a single form or multiple forms of multi-siting process(es).

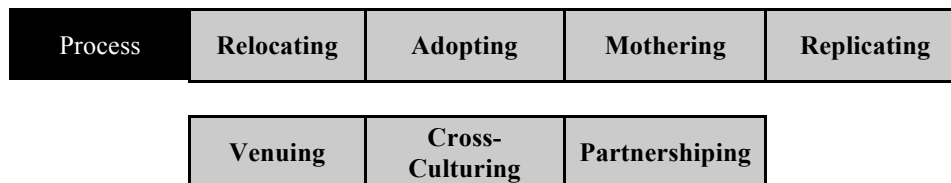


Figure 12. Primary methods of multi-siting process

Relocating process. In his 1997 doctoral thesis, “The Multi-site Church and Disciplemaking,” Earl Ferguson dichotomizes multi-site churches “into two large categories. Those that are *pro-active multi-site churches* [emphasis original] and those that are reactive.”⁹³ Ferguson further separates the reactive multi-site category into two subgroups, namely those seeking to “relocate” and those experiencing “growth

⁹³Ferguson, “The Multi-site Church and Disciplemaking,” 19-20. Ferguson’s perspective on the multi-site church movement is unique. He is (1) the earliest doctoral student on record for documenting the multi-site movement, (2) a former multi-site church pastor, and (3) the father of Dave and Jon Ferguson, pastors of Community Christian Church, Naperville (Chicago), IL.

explosion.”⁹⁴ Explaining the move to multi-site as a relocating process, Ferguson states,

A large percentage of these reactive multi-site churches come about as a result of trying to relocate. Typically, it is a down-town [*sic*] church whose constituency drives in from the suburbs and the leadership wants to relocate in a suburban area nearer the membership base. This is done by starting worship services at a location in or near the suburb or community where they want to relocate. Services will be held at both sites and for several years. This eases the pain of those who feel they are abandoning the old down-town [*sic*] site and allows time to reach new people in the area where the church plans to center its ministry base in the future.⁹⁵

Ferguson then identifies Skyline Wesleyan Church, Lemon Grove, California, and First Baptist Church Atlanta, Atlanta, Georgia, as churches that became multi-site by using the relocating process, and then later returned to a single site structure once relocation was complete. Site consolidation, however, is not always the case, and at times temporary multi-site arrangements become permanent. First Community Church, Columbus, Ohio, provides at least one example of an incomplete transition that created (and maintains presently) a multi-site church approach (Figure 13).⁹⁶

When Schaller labeled the “Relocation” multi-site expression in 1994, he had in view the “use of this option as one step in an extended relocation process.”⁹⁷ In reality, whether initiated by a plan for location transition or an unplanned explosion in growth, when asked, “How does your church utilize the multi-site concept?” the answer is the same. Those who enter into a multi-site arrangement via the relocating process do

⁹⁴See Schaller, *Innovations in Ministry*, 121.

⁹⁵Ferguson, “The Multi-site Church and Disciplemaking,” 19-20

⁹⁶Schaller presents a lengthy and detailed discussion on First Community Church, Columbus, Ohio. *Ibid.*, 124-31.

⁹⁷*Ibid.*, 121.

Relocating Process
<p>Definition: A multi-siting process designed to address relocation challenges of an existing church</p>
<p>Examples: Skyline Wesleyan Church, Lemon Grove (now La Mesa), California First Baptist Church Atlanta, Atlanta, Georgia First Community Church, Columbus, Ohio</p>

Figure 13. Summary of relocating multi-siting process

so to address inadequacies of their church building's physical site and/or situation. For definitional purposes then, the relocating process may be defined as: "A multi-siting process designed to address relocation challenges of an existing church."

Adopting process. The adopting process is well documented in other multi-site classification systems. Schaller calls it caring for a "Wounded Bird," defining the process as "an expression of a large congregation caring for wounded birds" or declining congregations with limited sustainability.⁹⁸ Easum and Travis provide a somewhat gentler title, "The Strong Church/Weak Church Approach," and then offer a more copious definition:

In this approach the healthy church takes a very strong leadership position over the hurting congregation, often taking it over and forming a partnership. When a dominant congregation gives leadership in the new location, the future success tends to be much better than when a weaker congregation still attempts to lead itself. The healthy church provides the staff and program for the hurting congregation and eventually absorbs the weaker church.⁹⁹

Harrison, Cheyney, and Overstreet give the adoption concept a positive

⁹⁸Ibid.

⁹⁹Easum and Travis, *Beyond the Box*, 95-96.

designation, calling it “The Resurrection Model.” Moreover, their definition highlights both the negative reality and available benefits of this multi-siting process:

Going into a dead or declining church and starting a multisite service [*sic*]. This model is becoming a popular and timely response to the thousands of church buildings that are vacant or host to declining congregations. This approach works especially well when the main campus has a number of members or families near the new site who are willing to attend the “resurrection” multi-site location. Those adopting this model might consider a “funeral celebration” for the old church, then launching the new multi-site.¹⁰⁰

Summarizing the explanations above, the multi-site adopting process is best defined as: “A multi-siting process in which a strong church assumes leadership and eventual ownership of a weaker church” (Figure 14). Several examples of this process are available. Easum and Travis highlight Lord of Life Lutheran Church in Fairfax, Virginia, taking the Holy Spirit Lutheran Church in Centerville, Virginia, “under their wing” and experiencing great success with the process.¹⁰¹

Adopting Process
<p>Definition: A multi-siting process in which a strong church assumes leadership and eventual ownership of a weaker church</p>
<p>Examples: Lord of Life Lutheran Church, Fairfax, Virginia Lifepoint Church, Columbus, Ohio Shelter Rock Church, Manhasset, New York</p>

Figure 14. Summary of adopting multi-siting process

In 2005, Delaware Baptist Church, of Delaware, Ohio, approached a year old

¹⁰⁰Harrison, Cheyney, and Overstreet, *Spin-Off Churches*, 78.

¹⁰¹Easum and Travis, *Beyond the Box*, 96.

single-sited church plant, Lifepoint Church, Lewis Center (Columbus), Ohio, offering their facilities and remaining church membership for adoption. Lifepoint accepted, and in February 2006 began their two-campus journey. Four years later, Lifepoint was averaging 575 in worship.¹⁰² Finally, McConnell details five more cases, including Shelter Rock Church, Manhasset, New York, and their adoption of Bible Baptist Church in 2005.¹⁰³

Mothering process. The mothering process covers a variety of multi-site arrangements. It can be defined as a multi-siting process by which a mother church launches or births new, often smaller, sites or niche expressions of their church. These expressions generally focus on specific locations, certain age populations, or ethnic niches. In some cases, these ministries become autonomous, and in others, they remain allied to varying degrees with their originating or mother site (Figure 15).

In previous multi-site classifications, four different categories have been used to describe this singular concept. Two of them belong to Schaller's multi-site expressions list. The first is labeled "Mothering" Strategy, and highlights Perimeter Church, Atlanta, Georgia, as the definitive category example.¹⁰⁴ In reality, Schaller's

¹⁰²"Lifepoint Story," Lifepoint Church [on-line]; accessed 19 September 2010; available from <http://www.lifepointcolumbus.com/lifepointstory>; Internet.

¹⁰³McConnell, *Multi-site Churches*, 225-26. The four additional cases of adoption arrangements are (1) Oasis Church, Pembroke Pines, FL, adopting First Baptist Church of North Miami, FL; (2) Spring Baptist Church, Spring, TX, adopting Bridgestone Baptist Church (no location given); (3) LifeChurch.tv, Edmond, OK, adopting, Metro Church, Edmond, OK; (4) The Chapel, Akron, OH, adopting undisclosed church. *Ibid.*, 225-33.

¹⁰⁴Schaller, *Innovations in Ministry*, 122. See Schaller's description of "The Perimeter Experience." Schaller gives minimal clarification on this designation and by definition ("a typical strategy for 'mothering' new missions"), his category does not match his example. This mismatch is interesting because Schaller connected the term "missions" with Perimeter Church. It seems that either Schaller could

“Mothering” Strategy fits well within the other designation of the “Key Church Strategy,” which is the establishment of a series of indigenous satellite congregations and launched from and supported by a primary or “key” church.¹⁰⁵

Mothering Process
<p>Definition: A multi-siting process by which a mother church launches or births new, often smaller, sites or niche expressions of their church.</p>
<p>Examples: First Baptist Church, Dallas, Texas Gambrell Street Baptist church, Fort Worth, Texas First Baptist Church, Arlington, Texas/Mission Arlington/Metroplex St. Luke’s United Methodist Church (“The Garden”), Indianapolis, Indiana Bethlehem Lutheran Church (“The Spirit Garage”), Minneapolis, Minnesota Upper Arlington Lutheran Church, Columbus, Ohio</p>

Figure 15. Summary of mothering multi-siting process

Examples of the Key Church Strategy are plentiful both within Schaller’s writings and Ahlen and Thomas’ work, *One Church, Many Congregations: The Key Church Strategy*. Some of these include First Baptist Church, Dallas, Texas; Gambrell Street Baptist Church, Fort Worth, Texas; Mission Metroplex/First Baptist Church,

not find a better name for the Perimeter concept or he was somehow unclear about the concept of Perimeter Church being one church with many congregations. Ibid.

¹⁰⁵Ibid., 71. Harrison, Cheyney, and Overstreet’s definition of their “Satellite Church Model” also fits within the mothering process classification: “In this approach, a main campus might have dozens of satellite congregations meeting in various locations, including apartment buildings, homes, office buildings, and schools. This method may include features of what is called the cell church, with the difference being that the members of satellite churches usually are not expected to come together in large celebration services, as is the case with cell churches. If most of the attendees never worship at the main campus, the churches are functionally satellite multisite churches rather than cell churches.” Harrison, Cheyney, and Overstreet, *Spin-Off Churches*, 77.

Arlington, Texas.¹⁰⁶

While somewhat different from Schaller's "mothering" multi-site expressions, Easum and Travis' "Apartment Approach" and "Mainline Approach" share the same defining elements with Schaller's. First, their "Apartment Approach" and Schaller's "Key Church Strategy" are similar, as validated by Easum and Travis' definition:

Many beyond-the-box congregations are more concerned with changing their cities than with growing their churches. Therefore, they form alliances with anyone in the city, regardless of denominational affiliation, in their efforts to reach the city for Christ In this approach, lay Christians from across denominational boundaries gather people for Bible studies and apartment clubhouses, mobile homes, and neighborhoods This allows specialized congregations to meet the needs of many micro-niches based on culture and social need. The ultimate goal is to provide an opportunity for every person in the city . . . to hear and respond to the gospel of Jesus Christ.¹⁰⁷

Both of the categories highlight the same example: Tillie Burgin and her work with Mission Arlington/Mission Metroplex.

In the "Mainline Approach" classification, Easum and Travis present cases in which mainline congregations are beginning to develop multi-site congregations in order to "expand their mission, reach a different demographic, or deal with a landlocked situation."¹⁰⁸ Examples include (1) St. Luke's United Methodist Church, Indianapolis, Indiana, and their "The Garden" site; (2) Bethlehem Lutheran Church, Minneapolis, Minnesota, and their "Spirit Garage" site, and (3) Upper Arlington Lutheran Church, Columbus, Ohio.

¹⁰⁶J. Timothy Ahlen and J. V. Thomas, *One Church, Many Congregations: The Key Church Strategy* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1999), 63-78, 92, 135-48.

¹⁰⁷Easum and Travis, *Beyond the Box*, 93.

¹⁰⁸*Ibid.*, 93-94.

Replicating process. The replicating process is probably the most common of the seven presented here. It can be defined as “a multi-siting process by which a church begins an additional campus or campuses that closely emulate(s) the style and approach of original campus.” Within this process, branding is often protected with extreme care. The goal is to provide “the same” worship, preaching, and community product at all sites (Figure 16).

Replicating Process
<p>Definition: A multi-siting process by which a church begins an additional campus or campuses that closely emulate(s) the style and approach of original campus</p>
<p>Examples: New Life Church, West Linn (Portland), Oregon Willow Creek Community Church, South Barrington (Chicago), Illinois Eastern Star Church, Indianapolis, Indiana</p>

Figure 16. Summary of replicating multi-siting process

Harrison, Cheyney, and Overstreet use the label “Franchise Approach” to capture this replicating idea. They explain the concept within a “cloning” framework:

As much as possible, these new worship communities are ‘cloned.’ There is a ‘branding’ element in this approach, where the sermon, songs, and other aspects of the worship service are generally copied from the mother or originating church. These often take on the flavor of a company owned franchise.¹⁰⁹

Surratt, Ligon, and Bird also make mention of this phenomenon, but with the title “Regional-Campus Model.” They define this approach as: “Replicating the experience of the original campus at additional campuses in order to make church more

¹⁰⁹Harrison, Cheyney, and Overstreet, *Spin-Off Churches*, 77.

accessible to other geographic communities.”¹¹⁰ As examples, they cite New Life Church, West Linn (Portland), Oregon; Willow Creek Community Church, South Barrington (Chicago), Illinois; and Eastern Star Church, Indianapolis, Indiana. Surratt, Ligon, and Bird argue that this model is focused primarily on circumventing geographic challenges of those “who do not want to or cannot make the long commute to the original campus.”¹¹¹

Venuing process. The multi-venue concept has been discussed in detail above, so presently only a cursory definition will be offered for this process category. The venuing process is “a multi-siting process by which a church creates additional worship venues beyond their primary worship gathering” (Figure 17).

Venuing Process
<p>Definition: A multi-siting process by which a church creates additional worship venues beyond their primary worship gathering at a single location</p>
<p>Examples: Jersey Baptist Church, Pataskala, Ohio North Coast Community Church, Vista, California Saddleback Community Church, Lake Forest, California</p>

Figure 17. Summary of venuing multi-siting process

¹¹⁰Surratt, Ligon, and Bird, *The Multi-Site Church Revolution*, 30, 32-36.

¹¹¹Ibid., 33. Schaller offers the “Urban Church” multi-site expression as “The urban church with two or three or four off-campus meeting places.” Schaller, *Innovations in Ministry*, 121. This expression may not fit tightly within the replicating process definition, but does fit to a degree within this general domain.

These venues may run simultaneous to the primary or original worship service, sharing some or no elements. Worship venues may also occur at different times, and they can be few in number or many. The key distinction of the venuing process is that a church becomes multi-site only with the addition of worship venues at their current location.

Cross-culturing process. Earl Ferguson provides in his doctoral thesis an example of a church capturing the essence of the multi-site cross-culturing process. Citing Charles Olsen's, *The Base Church: Creating Community through Multiple Forms*, Ferguson argues that Druid Hills Presbyterian Church was an early multi-cultural, multi-site church, based on the following commentary from Olsen.¹¹²

One example of a satellite base can be seen in the Druid Hills Presbyterian Church of Atlanta, Georgia. When Cubans began moving into the area, the church contacted them. The language barrier prohibited the Cuban group from sharing in the church's Sunday programs, so they developed parallel education and worship experiences, with the support and oversight of the Druid Hills Session.¹¹³

The Druid Hills arrangement was a short-lived endeavor, but the idea of a predominately Anglo church launching a worship venue or campus to reach different ethnic groups is gaining traction within multi-site churches. The multi-site cross-culturing process may thus be defined: as "a multi-siting process in which a church of one predominant ethnic demographic launches a campus focused on reaching a different ethnic group."¹¹⁴

Several examples of churches using this cross-culturing process are evident,

¹¹²Ferguson, "The Multi-site Church and Disciplemaking," 18-19.

¹¹³Charles M. Olsen, *The Base Church: Creating Community through Multiple Forms* (Atlanta: Forum House, 1973), 80.

¹¹⁴Harrison, Cheyney, and Overstreet list this concept as "The Multicultural Model" within their major approaches to multi-site taxonomy. They describe it as follows: "These multi-sites will use the same sermon and program that have been translated into the language and culture of the community. This

especially among Anglo churches wanting to reach Hispanic groups in their area (Figure 18). The Church of the Highlands, Birmingham, Alabama, for instance, utilizes an “Español” campus within their eight-campus structure.¹¹⁵ Because of their ministry focus on serving their community, leaders at The Healing Place Church, Baton Rouge, Louisiana, took note of the valuable contributions of Hispanic workers. The Healing Place saw the needs of Hispanics in Baton Rouge and the potential involved with creating a Healing Place campus designed specially for them. Presently, The Healing Place Church has one campus “*En Español*,” and they are preparing to start a second.¹¹⁶

Cross-culturing Process
<p>Definition: A multi-siting process in which a church of one predominate ethnic demographic launches a campus focused on reaching a different ethnic group</p>
<p>Examples: Druid Hills Presbyterian Church, Atlanta, Georgia Church of the Highlands, Birmingham, Alabama The Church of the Highlands, Birmingham, Alabama New Life Community Church, Chicago, Illinois</p>

Figure 18. Summary of cross-culturing multi-siting process

A final example of the cross-cultural process is New Life Community Church,

is a potential response to transitional communities and can build bridges among cultures.” Harrison, Cheyney, and Overstreet, *Spin-off Churches*, 78.

¹¹⁵“*Español*,” Church of the Highlands [on-line]; accessed 20 September 2010; available from <http://www.churchofthehighlands.com/campuses/espanol/>; Internet; see also Scott McConnell, *Multi-site Churches*, 215-16.

¹¹⁶“The Healing Place Church en Español,” Healing Place Church [on-line]; accessed 20 September 2010; available from <http://www.healingplacechurch.org/hispano/>; Internet. See McConnell, *Multi-site Churches*, 214.

Chicago, Illinois. As a multi-site church with 14 different worship sites, they do not have “a unified approach to worship,” due in large part to the multi-ethnic nature of their church. Eight of the 28 worship services held at New Life each weekend are in Spanish, and as their senior pastor Mark Job explains, “We do come together a couple times a year for a combined bi-lingual worship experience.”¹¹⁷

Partnershiping process. This final process condenses several forms of multi-site activities into a general theme. For definitional purposes, the multi-site partnership process may be defined as “a multi-siting process in which a church works cooperatively with a non-church entity to facilitate the creation of an additional campus site” (Figure 19).

Partnershiping Process
<p>Definition: A multi-siting process in which a church works cooperatively with a non-church entity to facilitate the creation of an additional campus site</p>
<p>Examples: Stillwater United Methodist Church, Dayton, Ohio Lake Pointe Church, Dallas, Texas Community Christian Church, Naperville (Chicago), Illinois</p>

Figure 19. Summary of partnershiping multi-siting process

In *Multi-Site Church Revolution*, the authors create the name “Partnership Model” to describing this process.¹¹⁸ Highlighting Stillwater United Methodist Church,

¹¹⁷Warren Bird, “Extending Your Church to More Than One Place,” 8.

¹¹⁸Surratt, Ligon, and Bird, *The Multi-Site Church Revolution*, 38-9.

Dayton, Ohio, they elucidate how church pastor Duane Anders approached a local YMCA about using their facility to host a campus of Stillwater UMC. The Kleptz YMCA (Englewood, Ohio) was in a building campaign, so the vice president of the organization pursued Anders about financial partnership for creating new space.¹¹⁹ Anders and Stillwater UMC agreed to the proposal, and as a part of the agreement, “a pastor’s office would be located in the Kleptz YMCA; the church could place a sign on the property and could meet on Sunday mornings and use the building one weekend evening a month.”¹²⁰ As the relationship has progressed with a campus pastor on site, Stillwater (christened Livingwater UMC as the site) has gone on “to establish a morning and afternoon preschool program.”¹²¹ By all indications, this relationship is healthy and growing.

Another example is Lake Pointe Church, Dallas, Texas. Lake Pointe entered into a partnership with the State of Texas Department of Corrections to launch a site of their church in a local prison. Church members facilitate church gatherings with services for both men and women prisoners each Thursday at Lake Pointe’s “Dawson Jail Campus.”¹²²

Community Christian Church, Naperville (Chicago), Illinois, worked with a private company to create a new site of Community Christian within an adult housing development in Romeoville, Illinois. As a part of the relationship, “the church holds a

¹¹⁹Ibid., 38.

¹²⁰Ibid.

¹²¹Ibid., 39.

¹²²“Reach: Missions & Outreach,” Lake Pointe Church [on-line]; accessed 10 November 2010; available from <http://www.lakepointe.org/Reach/Community.aspx>; Internet.

long term lease agreement to provide various types of programs with [a community center] facility including those directly tied to the church. This partnership includes the ‘for profit’ development company, a ‘not-for-profit’ foundation set up with the church and its leaders and development company.”¹²³

Conclusion

As this chapter began, the case was made that no comprehensive taxonomy of multi-site churches currently exists. Several reasons for this issue were presented, including, the newness of the multi-site church concept and movement, the limited number of churches utilizing the multi-site church structure, and the lack of information available chronicling their development.

Using the four existing multi-site classifications from (1) Lyle Schaller, (2) Bill Easum and Dave Travis, (3) Geoff Surratt, Greg Ligon, and Warren Bird, and (4) Rodney Harrison, Tom Cheyney, and Don Overstreet, with supplemental research and interviews, a working multi-site church taxonomy has been formulated. This taxonomy is not a conclusive assessment of all multi-site church models. Rather, it is an entry point into multi-site church taxonomy. I am hopeful that as the multi-site church movement continues to grow and morph that others will see common multi-site characteristics, and that they will bring correction, clarity, and completion to this initial multi-site taxonomy (Table 7).

¹²³Dave Travis, “Multiple-Site/Multiple-Campus Churches: Report from a Leadership Network Forum, September 11-12, 2001,” Leadership Network [on-line]; accessed 20 October 2006; available from www.leadnet.org; Internet.

Table 7. Proposed Multi-site Taxonomy

PROXIMITY		Multiple Services	Multiple Venues	Localized Multi-sites	Regional Multi-sites	Extended Multi-sites	Internet Campus
			<p>One church with two or more (multiple) services at a single venue or multiple venues at one location (same campus)</p> <p>Jersey BC, Pataskala, OH North Coast Church, Vista, CA Saddleback Church, Lake Forest, CA Community Christian Church, Naperville, IL</p>	<p>One church with two or more campuses focused on a limited geographical area</p> <p>Bethlehem Baptist Church, Minneapolis, MN Long Hollow BC, Hendersonville, TN Cedar Creek Church, Perrysburg, OH New Life Church, Chicago, IL</p>	<p>One church with multiple sites positioned throughout a region</p> <p>National Community Church, Washington, DC Mosaic Church, Los Angeles, CA Church of the Highlands, Birmingham, AL Mars Hill Church, Seattle, WA</p>	<p>One church with many sites extending beyond a single region traversing multiple regions, states, or some combination of the three.</p> <p>Seacoast Community Church, Mount Pleasant, SC LifeChurch.tv, Edmond, OK Christ the King Comm. C., Mount Vernon, WA New Hope Church, Honolulu, Hawaii</p>	
PREACHING		Rover Model	Rotation Model	Collaboration Model	Video Model	Proxy Model	
		<p>A single individual traveling between two or more locations to preach during a weekend, especially during the Sunday morning hours</p> <p>Scott Memorial BC, San Diego, CA Perimeter Church, Atlanta, GA Church on the Way, Van Nuys, CA First Comm. Church, Columbus, OH</p>	<p>Two or more (multiple) individuals regularly preaching at the various location of a multi-site church</p> <p>FBC Windermere, Windermere, FL Valley Bible Fellowship, Bakersfield, CA Celebration Church, Jacksonville, FL Harvest Bible Fellow, Rolling Meadows, IL</p>	<p>Multiple individuals contribute to the creation of sermons delivered at the various locations of a multi-site church</p> <p>Community Christian Church, Naperville, IL Highview Baptist Church, Louisville, KY New Life Church, Chicago, IL</p>	<p>A church broadcasts live or reproduced video preaching to one or more of its venues or sites</p> <p>North Coast Church, Vista, CA LifeBridge Christian C., Longmont, CO Potter's House, Dallas, TX Blackhawk Church, Madison, WI</p>	<p>A church using video preaching from an outside source for regular corporate worship gatherings</p> <p>Heartland Comm. Church, Rockford, IL Comexus Community Church, Barrie, Ontario North Point Community Church, Alpharetta, GA LifeChurch.tv, Edmond, OK</p>	
PROCESS		Relocating	Adopting	Mothering	Replicating		
		<p>A multi-siting process designed to address relocation challenges of an existing church</p> <p>Skyline Wesleyan Church, La Mesa, CA First Baptist Church Atlanta, Atlanta, GA First Community Church, Columbus, OH</p>	<p>A multi-siting process in which a strong church assumes leadership and eventual ownership of a weaker church</p> <p>Lord of Life Lutheran Church, Fairfax, VA LifePoint Church, Columbus, OH Shelter Rock Church, Manhasset, New York</p>	<p>A multi-siting process by which a mother church launches or births new, often smaller, sites or niche expressions of their church.</p> <p>Gambrell Street. Bapt. Church, Fort Worth, TX Mission Metropolis/FBC, Arlington, TX St. Luke's UMC ("The Gardner"), Indianapolis, IN Bethlehem LC ("Spirit Garage?"), Minn., MN</p>	<p>A multi-siting process by which a church begins an additional campus or campuses that closely emulate(s) the style and approach of original campus</p> <p>New Life Church, West Lim (Portland), OR Willowcreek Comm. Church, S. Barrington, IL Eastern Star</p>		
		Venuing	Cross-Culturalizing	Partnership			
		<p>A multi-siting process by which a church creates additional worship venues beyond their primary worship gathering at a single location</p> <p>Jersey BC, Pataskala, OH North Coast Church, Vista, CA Saddleback Church, Lake Forest, CA</p>	<p>A multi-siting process in which a church of one predominant ethnic demographic launches a campus focused on reaching a different ethnic group</p> <p>New Life Church, Chicago, IL Healing Place Church, Baton Rouge, LA First Presbyterian Church, Sallinas, CA Church of the Highlands, Birmingham, AL</p>	<p>A multi-siting process in which a church works cooperatively with a non-church entity to facilitate the creation of an additional campus site</p> <p>Stillwater UMC, Dayton, OH Lake Pointe Church, Dallas, Texas Community Christian Church, Naperville, IL</p>			

CHAPTER 6

BIBLICAL AND THEOLOGICAL BOUNDARIES FOR DEVELOPING HEALTHY CHURCHES, WITH APPLICATION TO MULTI-SITE CHURCH MODELS

Introduction

The preceding chapters of this work focused on framing the multi-site church phenomenon within its historical context and presenting a concise explanation of key multi-site attributes. From these chapters, a cursory understanding of the multi-site church concept is now established for the reader; thus, it is appropriate to turn the discussion toward a biblical and theological evaluation of the multi-site church concept.

Several factors will guide the direction and breadth of this chapter. First, this discussion will be general in its treatment, rather than a detailed description of multi-site ecclesiology.¹ Only key areas of the multi-site church concept will be considered, and these considerations will focus on a select group of biblical and theological tension points regarding the multi-site church arrangement. In light of this understanding, the following five multi-site church tension areas will be addressed: (1) organization, (2) fellowship, (3) preaching, (4) pastoring, and (5) multiplication. Clearly, additional concerns about multi-site church structure may exist, but these five areas represent the key tension (and at

¹For a basic ecclesiology of multi-site churches, see R. Scott Reavely, “An Ecclesiology for Multi-site Churches: Thinking Biblically about the Local Church in Multiple Locations” (D.Min. diss., Western Seminary, 2007). Reavely’s work is written in a popular writing style, but it does introduce some of the ecclesiological challenges inherent with multi-site churches.

times friction) points most often addressed by both multi-site advocates and opponents alike.

Second, the purpose of this chapter is to ascertain a set of biblical and theological parameters to evaluate the biblical fidelity of multi-site church structures. If multi-site churches will indeed become “the new normal” as some predict, then at least some boundaries regarding the health and effectiveness of the multi-site church construct seem necessary.² The aforementioned tension points will serve as the basis for the parameters or boundaries offered.

Third, as mentioned previously, the multi-site church concept as presently defined is new. As is often the case with new phenomena, this novelty corresponds with a great deal of fluidity and morphing within multi-site churches and the multi-site movement. For example, it is revealing that churches like Scott Memorial Baptist Church, San Diego, California; Perimeter Church, Atlanta, Georgia; Mount Paran Church of God, Atlanta, Georgia; New Life Christian Fellowship, Chesapeake, Virginia; and Chartwell Baptist Church, Toronto, Canada, which were all pioneering multi-site churches no longer employ the multi-site church methodology.³ For those churches that

²Geoff Surratt, Greg Ligon, and Warren Bird, *A Multi-site Church Road Trip: Exploring the New Normal* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2009).

³Scott Memorial Baptist Church (now Shadow Mountain Community Church, El Cajon, CA) spun off its satellite congregations in the 1980s following the arrival of David Jeremiah. Gary McIntosh, telephone interview by the author, 13 September 2010. Perimeter Church separated their campuses into a network of churches and initiated Perimeter Ministries International with Randy Pope becoming its leader. To date, Perimeter has launched 20 churches around Atlanta, Georgia. “Frequently Asked Questions,” Perimeter Church [on-line]; accessed 29 September 2010; available from <http://www.perimeter.org/index.php?module=visitors§ion=38>; Internet. In 1996, “David Cooper was appointed as Senior Pastor [of Mount Paran Church of God]. Satellite congregations became autonomous as well. Dr. Paul Walker became General Overseer of the Church of God International.” “Beliefs, Values, Vision, and History,” Mount Paran Church of God [on-line]; accessed 29 September 2010; available from <http://www.mountparan.com/about.asp>; Internet. New Life Christian Fellowship launched Vanguard Ministries (now New Life Ministries International), “an umbrella network that includes New Life

continue to maintain multi-site structure, change is rampant in areas such as preaching, growth, proximity, campus planting, and leadership structures. This fluctuating nature of multi-site churches should lead both expert and novice multi-site observers to the understanding that the field of multi-site church is diverse and changing.⁴ Therefore, with some uncertainty and with a degree of caution, the boundaries rendered here will focus on creating guidelines that will guide multi-site churches to healthy and biblical faithfulness at present and into the future.

Does the Multi-Site Church Approach Fit within the Framework of Scripture?

Before moving forward, one vital question demands attention: “Does the multi-site church model fit within the framework of Scripture?” Some answer this question affirmatively, and others do not. Throughout this chapter, the spectrum of viewpoints on multi-site acceptability will be given attention with fair treatment offered to each

churches,” and in 2003 adopted a “new organizational plan that would effectively transform New Life from one church with many congregations to a well-connected family of churches.” Bill Easum and Dave Travis, *Beyond the Box: Innovative Churches that Work* (Loveland, CO: Group, 2003), 88-89; “History,” Chartwell Baptist Church [on-line]; accessed 29 September 2010; available from <http://newlife.cc/weare/history.htm>; Internet. Most recently, on November 3, 2010, Chartwell Baptist Church (which became multi-site in 1993) split into multiple churches. According to a letter to the congregation dated September 6, 2010: “Late in 2009, the Board, through a consultative process with its pastors and congregational leaders, determined that Chartwell’s present organizational and administrative structure had become an impediment to the realization of the church’s identified vision. Consensus arose that living out the vision going forward would be best accomplished through the creation of autonomous churches rather than through the existing loosely connected congregations. This conclusion was supported by both the pastors and congregational leaders. To that end, at a meeting held on June 16th, 2010 the members of Chartwell Baptist Church resolved that the congregations known as Chartwell at Clarkson, Chartwell at King’s, 228 Chartwell / Chartwell at Kerr and The Well become three self-governing, autonomous churches.” “Chartwell Baptist Transition Statement,” Chartwell Baptist Church [on-line]; accessed 29 September 2010; available from <http://www.chartwellchurch.org/>; Internet.

⁴Consider the following sources: Geoff Surratt, Greg Ligon, and Warren Bird, *The Multi-Site Church Revolution* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2006) 29-30; Matt Chandler, “Clouds on the Horizon,” *9Marks eJournal* 6, no. 3 (2009): 40; Greg Gilbert, “What Is This Thing, Anyway? A Multi-site Taxonomy,” *9Marks eJournal* 6, no. 3 (2009): 28; Warren Bird, “One Church in Many Locations: What Multi-Site Churches Do in Addition to Worship—Insights from 35 Different Multi-Site Churches,

position.⁵

Six key biblical and theological realities lead the author to accept multi-site structure as a valid expression of church. First, when surveying the New Testament beginning with Jesus' birth and ending with the completion of the canon, one must realize that ecclesiology was in a state of evolution.⁶ It was not fixed upon Jesus' departure, nor was it fixed at Paul's death.⁷ Paul's growing understanding of what the church is and how it should function provides a clear example of this evolution in his understanding of the church.⁸ On this topic, Millard Erickson's commentary is

"Leadership Network [on-line]; accessed 23 June 2006; available from www.leadnet.org; Internet; Reavely, "An Ecclesiology for Multi-site Churches," 55-57.

⁵Kevin Giles offers helpful caution on formulating ecclesiology. Throughout my research processes, I have sought to embrace what Giles urges here. Without embracing a similar position as the reader, it will be difficult to engage and evaluate the multi-site concept fairly. Giles states: "Modern critical scholarship demands that ancient texts be read in their historical and cultural context. When we come to the text the primary question must be, 'What is presupposed by the words and the ideas as far as the writer and his readers were concerned?'" This approach demands the contemporary cultural experience and the ecclesial commitments be laid to one side as far as possible, as the text is studied. It means that we recognize there are profound differences between the social and ecclesial world of the early Christians and those we take for granted. It also means that in coming to the text our concern is not to prove or substantiate any viewpoint already held but to hear the text itself. This leads to a second principle basic to critical theological methodology, namely, that dogma or doctrine must not be allowed to determine in advance the conclusions reached. The possibility must be accepted that the earliest Christian texts reflect a diversity of opinion and ideas that do not correspond to later dogmatic formulations." Kevin N. Giles, "Church Order, Government," in *Dictionary of the Later New Testament & Its Developments*, ed. Ralph P. Martin and Peter H. Davis (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1997), 219.

⁶See Saucy's explanation of the NT's "transitional nature" regarding ecclesiology: "The New Testament, recording as it does the life of the church from its inception through the apostolic period, presents a certain amount of variety in church forms, due at least partially to the transitional nature of this period. Despite this fact, most interpreters have seen at least some basic elements of church governmental form prescribed or hinted in the biblical record." Robert L. Saucy, *The Church in God's Program* (Chicago: Moody, 1972), 105-06.

⁷Giles asserts: "Consensus is that Jesus did not lay down a given pattern for the organization and government of the church, but this slowly evolved as the early Christians took over and modified Jewish communal structures, which were also evolving in the first century A.D." Giles, "Church Order, Government," 219.

⁸Banks cites an example of progressing ecclesiological development in Colossians and Ephesians. He states: "In Colossians and Ephesians, there is an advance in Paul's thought, involving the setting forth of the relationship which the church, as the body of Christ, bears to Christ as head of the body." Robert J. Banks, "Church," in *Dictionary of Paul and His Letters*, ed. Gerald Moore and Ralph P.

instructive. He comments, “We should bear in mind that at this point [NT era] the Church was just coming into being: it was not as yet sharply distinguished from Judaism. The pragmatic needs in a period of establishment are, naturally, quite different from those in a later stage of development.”⁹ In sum, the evolving nature of the church during its founding years demonstrates that ecclesiology was not a fixed understanding shared by all in the NT era.

Second, during the NT era the concept of *ekklesia* was fluid from location to location and situation to situation.¹⁰ Variation existed in terms of where, how often, in what numbers, in what groups, and for what purposes the New Testament *ekklesias* met.¹¹ As such, no singular NT church arrangement (or a combination of them all) provides a clear ecclesiological structure. Again, Erickson offers beneficial insight, remarking,

It is likely that [in the NT era] church government was not highly developed, indeed, that local congregations were rather loosely knit groups. There may well have been rather wide varieties of governmental arrangements. Each church adopted a pattern that fit its individual situation.¹²

This fluidity allows for variation and flexibility in the way contemporary believers

Martin (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1993), 128. Banks also highlights Paul’s “broadening concept of *ekklesia* . . . in Galatians, where Paul contrasts the children of the ‘present Jerusalem’ with those who belong to the ‘Jerusalem above’ (Gal 4:25-27).” Robert Banks, *Paul’s Idea of Community: The Early House Churches in their Cultural Setting*, rev. ed. (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1994), 39. For further explanation of Paul’s developing ecclesiology, see Bank’s entire chapter on “Church as Heavenly Reality.” *Ibid.*, 37-46.

⁹Millard J. Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1998), 1094.

¹⁰Wayne A. Meeks, *The First Urban Christians: The Social World of the Apostle Paul*, 2nd ed. (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press 2003), 75-76, 107-10.

¹¹Banks provides some insight into the variety of forms [Banks, *Paul’s Idea of Community*, 33-6], as does George E. Ladd [George Eldon Ladd, *A Theology of the New Testament*, rev. ed. (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 2001), 577]. An important example of this form variation is explained in Roger W. Gehring’s discussion on the relationship between “the local church as a whole” and house churches in the expansion of NT churches. Roger W. Gehring, *House Church and Mission: The Importance of Household Structures in Early Christianity* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2004), 155-60.

¹²Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 1094.

organize and structure their churches.¹³

John Piper sees the lack of NT ecclesiological particulars as a “divine invitation” to develop culturally appropriate church structures. In his sermon to Bethlehem Baptist Church, Minneapolis, Minnesota, while presenting the case for adopting the multi-site concept, Piper argued,

I did not take [the lack of ecclesiological particulars] as a divine oversight. I take it is a divine invitation to do what we Elders are calling you to do over the next seven weeks or so. I think God left the particulars open so the churches could be structured in ways appropriate to the Fulani of Cameroon, and the Waoroni of Ecuador, and the medieval Vikings of Scandinavia, in the underground Church of China, and the nomadic Fulbi of Chad, and even the different cultures of the Twin Cities. I take this New Testament flexibility to be an invitation to the leaders and the people of every church to fast and pray for God’s leading in matters that are not defined in the Bible—like video or no video, multi-campus or single-campus, large buildings or small buildings, one service or many services, Sunday school or no Sunday school, Wednesday-night connection or no Wednesday-night connection, one-hour services or two-hour services, home groups or no home groups, hymns or worship songs, organs or guitars, circuit riding preacher or a stationary preacher, one preacher or several preachers, 20 elders or 60 elders, and on and on the New Testament does not dictate.¹⁴

Third, Jesus speaks minimally about church structure (Matt. 16:18; 18:7) and Paul gives relatively little attention to the subject.¹⁵ It would seem that if ecclesiological

¹³See Banks, *Paul’s Idea of Community*, 33.

¹⁴John Piper, “The Goodness and the Groaning of Growth: Thoughts on Bethlehem’s Future,” Sermon. Bethlehem Baptist Church, Minneapolis, Minnesota. 8 June 2003, 4. J.D. Greer corroborates this line of thinking: “The New Testament gives guidelines, but not specific details, on how to best organize a congregation for pastoral care and effective ministry.” J. D. Greear, “A Pastor Defends His Multi-Site Church,” *9Marks eJournal* 6, no. 3 (2009): 22.

¹⁵Marshall provides a brief summary of Jesus’ teachings on church structure. I. Howard Marshall, “Church,” in *Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels*, ed. Joel B. Green, Scott McKnight, and I. Howard Marshall (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1992), 124-25. According to Robert Banks, Paul generally spoke to matters of ecclesiology only when the church health was somehow in jeopardy. Banks relays, “[Paul] was certainly concerned that the church conduct itself in an orderly manner and that members were properly cared for and guided. But except where these were inadequate or threatened in some way, he says very little about them. For him [order and governance] appear to be secondary rather than primary issues. Where more fundamental aspects of church life are given priority, church order and government should largely look after themselves.” Robert J. Banks, “Church Order and Government,” in

form were of great importance to these two individuals in particular, the Scriptures would reveal far more specific details about the topic.¹⁶ In reality, Scriptures demonstrate that God did not choose to provide a specific formula for church structure.¹⁷ John Piper elaborates on this notion:

Neither here [Acts 2:36-37] nor anywhere else in the New Testament do we get detailed instructions on how to organize the church for pastoral care and worship and teaching and mobilization for ministry. There were elders in the churches (they show up very soon in the Jerusalem church) and there were deacons, and there were goals of teaching and caring and maturing and praying and evangelizing and missions. But as far as details on how to structure the church in a city or in an area or even one local church with several thousand saints—there are very few particulars.¹⁸

While patterns and practices of church structure may be evident, no definitive or conclusive church format is discernable.¹⁹ Therefore, if multi-site church structures fit

Dictionary of Paul and His Letters, ed. Gerald Moore and Ralph P. Martin (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1993), 132. See also Schreiner's comment on Paul's purpose: "His goal was to plant churches in specific localities. Only when churches were established (1 Thess 3:1-10) did he feel his work was not in vain. The majority of his letters were addressed to the needs of such churches, instructing and exhorting them to stay true to the faith." Thomas R. Schreiner, *Paul, Apostle for God's Glory: A Pauline Theology* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2001), 331.

¹⁶Saucy offers additional and appropriate insight on this topic: "Support for the freedom of form is sometimes taken from the fact that Christ himself gave no specific directions concerning the government of the church. However, this is answered by the fact that the church was not in existence at that time, and that he did promise to give additional truth through the coming Holy Spirit." Saucy, *The Church in God's Program*, 106.

¹⁷Some do reject this idea. Augustus Strong, for example, rejects the notion "that the form of church organization is not definitely described in the New Testament." Strong argues, "A proper theory of development does not exclude the idea of a church organization already complete in all essential particulars before the close of the inspired canon, so that the record of it may constitute a providential example of binding authority upon all subsequent ages. The view [that the NT does not definitely prescribe a form of church organization] exaggerates the differences of practice among the N. T. churches; underestimates the need of divine direction as to the methods of church union; and admits a principle of 'church powers', which may be historically shown to be subversive of the very existence of the church as a spiritual body." Augustus H. Strong, *Systematic Theology: A Compendium*, reprint (Valley Forge, PA: Judson Press, 1907), 896.

¹⁸Piper, "The Goodness and the Groaning of Growth," 4.

¹⁹Saucy, *The Church in God's Program*, 106; see Dever's thoughts on this subject: "If you start looking in the New Testament for how we should organize a church, you won't find a straightforward manual on church government; there is no ideal constitution for a church." Mark Dever, *9Marks of a*

within clear ecclesiological directives of the NT, no reason exists to disallow them.

Fourth, the structure and nomenclature of NT churches borrowed from contemporary secular and religious structures of the NT era.²⁰ For example, Paul's use of *ekklesia*, a secular (Hellenistic) word for "gathering," over *sunagoge* displays an intentional effort on Paul's part to develop a theologically correct and contextually relevant understanding of "church."²¹ Similarly, whether Paul instructed the appointment of "elders" over Christian gatherings based on Judaic synagogue leadership patterns (as J.

Healthy Church (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2004), 221; Danny Akin's assessment is also helpful on this point: "A study of Scripture provides a number of snapshots of the early church doing church. A number of ecclesial patterns emerge, and specific commands appear periodically as well. *Still, the New Testament does not provide a precise manual on how the structure of church government should be organized*" [emphasis added]. Danny Akin, "The Single-Elder-Led Church," in *Perspectives on Church Government: Five Views of Church Polity*, ed. Chad Owen Brand and R. Stanton Norman (Nashville: Broadman and Holman, 2004), 25.

Consider, for example, Neil Cole's categorization of NT church models. Cole describes (1) "the Jerusalem model: a homogenous, local megacongregation;" (2) "the Antioch model: a multiethnic, missional congregation;" (3) "the Thessalonica model: a multiethnic missional regional network;" (4) "the Roman model: an urban network of organic churches in a major city;" (5) "the Ephesian model: decentralized networks of missional organic churches." Neil Cole, *Church 3.0: Upgrades for the Future of the Church* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2010), 99-115.

Hadaway, Wright, and Dubose validate this reality most succinctly: "In the final analysis, there is no one structure which is sacred or ultimate. Even the New Testament churches appropriated a variety of settings and employed a variety of approaches in public proclamation of the gospel ministry to the people. Moreover, not even the house churches or home meetings were all alike. They varied in size, setting, and leadership. The three most discernable church models—Jerusalem, Antioch, and Ephesus—were all urban churches but differed greatly in terms of styles of leadership, meeting places, emphasis, and outreach methodology." C. Kirk Hadaway, Stuart A. Wright, and Francis M. DuBose, *Home Cell Groups and House Churches* (Nashville: Broadman, 1987), 77-78.

²⁰Banks elaborates, "Paul's communities must be seen as part of a wider movement towards the spontaneous association of individuals in society and as a parallel development to the religious fellowships that were growing in popularity within Judaism and Hellenism during that period. While, in view of Paul's preconversion background and missionary environment, it is the synagogue and mystery cult that must be brought into closest comparison with his idea of community, the monastic fraternities and philosophical schools form part of the wider background to his approach." Banks, *Paul's Idea of Community*, 14.

²¹*Ibid.*, 29; See Meeks' chapter on "The Formation of Ekklesia" in which he compares Pauline churches "with groups and organizations in the Greco-Roman city." These comparisons include "The Household," "The Voluntary Association," "The Synagogue," and "Philosophical or Rhetorical School." Meeks, *The First Urban Christians*, 74-84. See also, Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 1094-95.

T. Burtchaell and others suggest)²² or he simply ratified familial household *oikos* structures to develop a local church leadership base as Gehring asserts, Paul leaned heavily upon existing social and cultural norms to structure the early church for expansion and growth.²³ If Paul used contextual social norms of his era to create and design the framework of the first churches, it would seem that a similar pattern of influence could be allowable and beneficial in designing church structures today.²⁴

Some argue forcefully that multi-site structures lean too heavily upon secular sources for their design.²⁵ While critique of any new structure should be welcomed and addressed, a careful consideration must be given in the process of critique. Craig Van Gelder cogently summarizes the challenge of constructing appropriate ecclesiological structures.

What is crucial in [developing organizational structure] is for the church to maintain a balance among biblical foundations, historical developments, and contextual realities. Some tend to absolutize biblical forms as if God ordained a specific organizational pattern for the church to follow, and so they seek to replicate the biblical pattern for the church's structure, processes, and leadership. Some tend to make certain historical forms into a normative polity for the church at all times and all places. These approaches are common in churches stemming from the

²²Gehring, *House Church and Mission*, 192. See also: J. T. Burtchaell, *From Synagogue to Church: Public Services and Offices in the Earliest Christian Communities* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992).

²³Gehring presents a detailed discussion on the various views on sources of the development of "eldership" in Pauline writings. Gehring, *House Church and Mission*, 190-210. Cf. Gehring with this line of reasoning. Banks, *Paul's Idea of Community*, 147.

²⁴See Erickson's discussion on "Constructing a System of Church Government for Today." Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 1094-97.

²⁵For example, White and Yeats criticize "multi-campus structures" because they perceive such paradigms advocate the concept of "pastor as CEO" and "control of a centralized business structure." Thomas White and John Mark Yeats, *Franchising McChurch: Feeding Our Obsession with Easy Christianity* (Colorado Springs, CO: David C. Cook, 2009), 81-82. White moves beyond critique into criticism in a separate and plainly vitriolic article on multi-site churches. The title reveals the tenor of the effort. Thomas White, "Nine Reasons I Don't Like Multi-site Churches, from A Guy Who Should," *9Marks eJournal* 6, no. 3 (2009): 42. See also, Jonathan Leeman, "The Alternative: Why Don't We Plant?" *9Marks eJournal* 6, no. 3 (2009): 66.

Protestant Reformation where ecclesiology and polity focused on identifying and maintaining the true, institutional church. Some tend to make the church fit new cultural contexts with little regard for biblical principles and historical developments. They use a pragmatic decision-making approach on the premise that what works is of the Spirit and must, therefore, be biblical. All three approaches plague the church today. All three remind us how important it is for the church to be flexible and adaptive with the new context and changing circumstances, which is what we find in the New Testament church.²⁶

In light of Van Gelder's considerations, it seems fitting that if (1) multi-site structures do not violate Scripture; and (2) multi-site practitioners acknowledge contextual realities, then there is no reason to exclude the multi-site church structure from application.²⁷

Fifth, throughout church history, there has been great variance in how believers apply NT teachings to create ecclesiological structures. Kevin Giles highlights this challenge:

Many Christians still believe that the NT exclusively supports their ecclesiology. All too many Presbyterians, Roman Catholics, Anglicans and Pentecostals, just to take four examples, find their church order and no other endorsed by the New Testament. Aspects of each ecclesiology are present in the Scriptures but not as one given pattern and not in any set form. The NT exhibits diversity and development in church order and in patterns of leadership.²⁸

Given the different approaches to church structure adopted throughout church history, in the words of George Eldon Ladd, "one can hardly be dogmatic" about a topic that lacks

²⁶Van Gelder, *The Essence of the Church*, 159. See also, *Ibid.*, 47.

²⁷Stetzer and Putman's comment on "multiple expressions" support this position: "We must continue to encourage, support, allow, and experiment with new expressions of the same biblical church in new cultures. Breaking the [missional] code will continue to require that we open our eyes to see the many harvests. In reality, the harvest looks radically different than it did just a few short years ago. If we are to fulfill the Great Commission, it may require us to have many expressions of church often on the same campus, certainly in most geographical contexts. Ed Stetzer and David Putman, *Breaking the Missional Code: Your Church Can Become a Missionary in Your Community* (Nashville: B&H, 2006), 110.

²⁸Giles, "Church Order, Government," 220; See Van Elder's assessment of the Free-church movement. Van Gelder, *The Essence of the Church*, 59.

great clarity.²⁹ In terms of multi-site application, this reality appears to present great freedom and allowance in utilizing multi-site structures.

Sixth, multi-site church arrangements are validated by the design of the gospel message. The focus of the New Testament and the entire redemption story is God's reconciliation of man to Himself for His glory. Thus, *any* contextualized ecclesiological structure that does not contradict or violate Scripture should be available for use in order to expand God's kingdom and increase His glory. In response to this ideology, Alan Hirsh writes,

By my reading of the scriptures, ecclesiology is the most fluid of the doctrines. The church is a dynamic cultural expression of the people of God in any given place. Worship style, social dynamics, liturgical expressions must result from the process of contextualizing the gospel in any given culture. *Church must follow mission* [emphasis original].³⁰

If multi-site ecclesiological expressions achieve the purposes of God's design and they more effectively aid churches in reaching the lost, the multi-site church conception is not only appropriate—it is also commendable.

Is the Multi-Site Church Approach a Market-Driven Phenomenon?

Taken together, the realities above demonstrate that the model-site church approach does not contradict the framework of Scripture. Nevertheless, some still raise concerns based on the influences of secular business practices and methods on multi-site church formulation. This concern leads to another important question: Is the multi-site

²⁹Ladd, *A Theology of the New Testament*, 579; see also Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994), 904.

³⁰Alan Hirsh, *Forgotten Ways: Reactivating the Missional Church* (Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2006), 145.

church approach to ministry a market-driven phenomenon? The answer to this question is both “yes” and “no.”

John Hammett contends, “Overall . . . the idea and practice of unity in multi-site churches seems to be tied to modern developments in communication, transportation, and technology.”³¹ Both Schaller and Towns individually came to a similar conclusion nearly twenty years earlier.³² In fact, as was detailed in the second chapter of this work, the development of the multi-site church construct is contingent upon human advancements in technology, communication, business practices, communication, and transportation over the last century. So yes, to a degree the multi-site approach was (and remains) facilitated by economic and technological factors of growth and influence.

The role of the marketplace in multi-site church development is limited, however. Neither multi-site churches nor multi-site ministries before them originated because of, or out of, a marketplace stimulus. Multi-site churches *began* because churches and their leaders were seeking to obey Scripture’s primary commands regarding the church. As Surratt, Ligon, and Bird explain in *The Multi-site Church Revolution*,

The primary motive behind the multisite approach is to obey the church’s God-given directives. The Great Commandment (Matt 22:37-39) is to love God and one another, the Great Commission (Matt 28:18-20) is to make disciples of all nations, and the Great Charge (1 Peter 5:1-4) reminds us to involve all believers in ministry.³³

³¹John S. Hammett, “Have We Ever Seen This Before? Multi-site Precedents,” *9Marks eJournal* 6, no. 3 (2009): 33.

³²Lyle E. Schaller, *Discontinuity and Hope: Radical Change and the Path to the Future* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1999), 174-79; see also, Schaller, *Innovations in Ministry: Models for the 21st Century* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1993), 119-24; and Elmer Towns, *Inside Look at 10 of Today’s Most Innovative Churches* (Ventura, CA: Regal, 1990), 244-45.

³³Surratt, Ligon, and Bird, *Multi-Site Church Revolution*, 10. In their second book on multi-site churches, the authors expound further: “For many churches, the biblical motivation for embracing the multisite model isn’t very controversial. Churches want to fulfill the Great Commission (Matt. 28:19–20) by giving more opportunities for the gospel to be shared. They want to obey the Great Commandment

While some may contest these claims as anecdotal, existing research provides validation to Surratt, Ligon, and Bird's findings. In a self-completed survey of 150 multi-site churches conducted in 2003, Leadership Network found that 55 percent of respondents said "evangelistic outreach" was their "primary motivation for doing multi-site."³⁴ In 2007, a similar survey of 228 multi-site churches conducted by the Leadership Network documented an 8-percentage point increase in the number of churches citing the same factor as their primary motivator for becoming multi-site.³⁵

If the secular marketplace and consumerism were the driving forces spawning the multi-site church movement, then the entire concept should be rejected because it would center upon the elevation of churches and leaders for their profit, benefit, and acclaim. What one finds in the multi-site church movement, however, is an urgency to reach people with the gospel. Randy Pope, who was one of the founding fathers of the

(Matt. 22:37–40) by taking the love of Christ to the people, meeting them where they are. The churches believe that new campuses are places where (to borrow the metaphors of Jesus in Luke 15) lost sheep and coins are sought out, and where lost children are welcomed home. They want to take big risks for God that don't violate Scripture, sharing the apostle Paul's dream that "by all possible means I might save some. I do all this for the sake of the gospel" (1 Cor 9:22-23). Surratt, Ligon, and Bird, *A Multi-site Road Trip*, 201.

While affirming of the multi-site approach, Allison provides prudent critique about using 1 Cor 9:22 as a biblical validation for multi-site churches: "But the argument does not compare like with like," Allison explains. "There's a difference between personal adaptation (becoming as a Jew for the Jews) and church adaptation (for example, becoming an artistic community for the artists). The latter requires a church to adopt a homogeneity principle and thereby abandon the biblical idea that the local church is where social (barbarian, slave, free) and ethnic (Jew, Gentile) divisions dissolve." Gregg Allison, "Theological Defense of Multi-Site," *9Marks eJournal* 6, no. 3 (2009): 10.

³⁴Warren Bird, "Survey of 1,000 Multi-Site Churches: A Dozen of the Most Significant Findings." Dallas, TX: Leadership Network, 3 [on-line]; accessed 26 July 2004; available from www.leadnet.org; Internet.

³⁵Seven responses were preselected as possible answers to the question: "30. What is your *primary motivation* [emphasis original] for doing multi-site? (Check the ONE best answer)." The available responses, number of churches that selected each response, and the percentage of the survey group that selected each response are as follows: (1) "Evangelistic outreach": 112 churches, 63 percent; (2) "Solve overcrowding": 31 churches, 18 percent; (3) "Raise quality level": 1 church, 1 percent; (4) "Offer multiple worship styles": 9 churches, 5 percent; (5) "Bring our church closer to a target area": 25 churches, 13 percent; (6) "Cross language or ethnic barriers": 1 church, 1 percent; and (7) "Other": 5 churches, 3

multi-site church concept, had a “burden,” according to Elmer Towns, “to reach the entire metropolitan area [of Atlanta, Georgia] and influence its society.”³⁶ Some thirty years after Pope launched Perimeter Church’s second campus, J. D. Greear now pursues the lost of Durham, North Carolina, with the same gospel-centric focus and resolve. “The multi-site approach, in our judgment,” says Greear, “best allows us to be effective in evangelism, pastorally responsible over our members, and to develop leaders and church planters.”³⁷ These responses, and others like them, demonstrate that the primary stated motivation for becoming a multi-site is indeed reaching people with the gospel.³⁸

Even though multi-site churches do not contradict the pattern and framework of Scripture, tension points still arise with its application.³⁹ In fact, even ardent supporters like Greear concede that his church and its leadership are still “wrestling with” facets of the multi-site strategy.⁴⁰ This wrestling with multi-site will occupy the focus

percent. “Survey of 1000 Multi-Site Churches-January 2007: Results Overview,” Dallas, TX: Leadership Network; 26 January 2007.

³⁶Towns, *10 of Today’s Most Innovative Churches*, 90.

³⁷Greear, “A Pastor Defends His Multi-Site Church,” 22.

³⁸Admittedly, there are those who probably have and will continue to become and expand a multi-site church framework for their own self-elevation and glory. It is clear, however, based on works of primary multi-site leaders that their utilization of the multi-site approach is based upon a desire to bring more people into personal relationship with Christ. For examples see Larry Osborne, *Sticky Church* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2008); Dave Browning, *Deliberate Simplicity: How the Church Does More by Doing Less* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2009); Dino Rizzo, *Servolution: Starting a Church Revolution through Serving* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2009); J. V. Thomas and J. Timothy Ahlen, *One Church, Many Congregations: The Key Church Strategy* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1999); Dave Ferguson, Jon Ferguson, and Eric Bramlett, *The Big Idea: Focus the Message, Multiply the Impact* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2007); and Robert Lewis and Wayne Cordeiro, *Culture Shift: Transforming Your Church from the Inside Out* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2005).

³⁹See Towns’ discussion on the biblical argument for the geographical extended [multi-site] church. Elmer L. Towns, “Church-Planting Models” in *A Practical Encyclopedia of Evangelism and Church Growth* (Ventura, CA: Regal, 1995), 104.

⁴⁰His questions include the following: (1) Does the “one body” ever need to assemble all together in one place? If so, how often? (2) What is the best way to organize budgeting and staff structures so that each campus has freedom to organize its ministries effectively while at the same time ensuring that

throughout the remainder of this chapter. Each of the tension points highlighted above will be dealt with individually, and parameters will be set forth as appropriate to ensure health and biblical fidelity of multi-site approaches. Accordingly, the first tension point with which to wrestle is that of multi-site organization. The key question of multi-site organizations is simple: “How do we structure our polity?”

Organizing: How Do We Structure Our Polity?

In attempting to assess multi-site church polity, two points must be understood from the onset of discussion—one historic and one contemporary. First, as it has been noted previously, historical consensus does not exist within Christianity as to a single form of church organization and government. Erickson attributes this issue to two problems:

Attempts to develop a structure of church government that adheres to the authority of the Bible encounter difficulty at two points. The first is the lack of didactic material. There is no prescriptive exposition of what the government of the church is to be like comparable to, say, Paul’s elucidation of the doctrines of human sinfulness and justification by faith. The churches are not commanded to adopt a particular form of church order. The only didactic passages on church government are Paul’s enumerations of basic qualifications for offices that already existed (1 Tim. 3:1-13; Titus 1:5-9). Although it is preferable to build on the basis of didactic or prescriptive rather than narrative or descriptive passages, in this case we have little choice.

When we turned to examine the descriptive passages, we find a second problem: there is no unitary pattern. On the one hand, there are strongly democratic elements, a fact pointed out by the advocates of the congregational form. There also are strongly monarchical elements, particularly the apostles appointing and ordaining officers in instructing the churches, passages highlighted by those who favor the episcopal approach. From still other passages we conclude that the elders had a strong role.

each campus retains the DNA of the whole church? (3) How do we best do membership and discipline in the multi-site model? (4) How can congregations vote on issues when people live too far from one another to be able to congregate often? (5) How far is too far when planting a new campus? Can one ‘local church’ have campuses all across the world? (6) If people rotate which campuses they attend, will that make it difficult for elders and other leaders effectively to watch over them? (7) How will we know when a campus would function better as an independent church? Greear, “A Pastor Defends His Multi-Site Church,” 25-26.

It is probably safe to say that the evidence from the New Testament is inconclusive; nowhere in the New Testament do we find a picture closely resembling any of the fully developed systems of today.⁴¹

Second, a multiplicity of multi-site church polities exist presently, and as such, one cannot evaluate all multi-site church polities as one polity pattern. Greg Gilbert, in his article, “What Is This Thing, Anyway? A Multi-site Taxonomy,” aptly articulates that writing on “The Polity of Multi-site Churches” is “too broad a category unless you are going to write a book.” He concludes, “There are simply too many multi-site churches with too many different models of church government.”⁴² Gilbert is correct, and a more thorough treatment of multi-site polity, therefore, will be set aside presently.

With these two historic and contemporary qualifications established, the idea of multi-site polity will now be evaluated generally. Following this evaluation, multi-site polity parameters, can in turn, be offered.⁴³

Assessing Multi-Site Church Polities

Robert Banks introduces his article, “Church Order and Government,” with a keen statement that proves especially pertinent to assessing multi-site church polities. Banks cautions,

For modern people questions of order and government are often of primary interest. Organization and leadership are central concerns in any democratic and bureaucratic-rational society. This is also the case in church life, which is more democratized and bureaucratic than in previous times. In our social and religious arrangements we prize order: it is not only a preoccupation but a virtue, not only a means but an end. We are also fascinated by the issue of leadership, with chains of

⁴¹Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 1094.

⁴²Gilbert, “What Is This Thing, Anyway? A Multi-site Taxonomy,” 28.

⁴³No attempt will be made here to defend, accentuate, or endorse any one church governmental pattern. For the sake of disclosure, the author’s bias is toward a congregational form of church government.

command, lines of authority and so forth.⁴⁴

Given this strong focus on church government and leadership in modern times, the multi-site church concept automatically becomes somewhat of a supercharged issue. This idea does not mean that multi-site topic is polemical necessarily (while for some it is). It does mean, however, that the multi-site concept, because it inherently weaves leadership and church organization so tightly together, has and will continue to attract much attention.

In many respects, the discussion about multi-site church organization hinges on a person's view of what is and is not allowable in his or her preferred matrix of church polity. If one views boundaries of polity in a more porous manner, multi-site churches, in most of their expressions, likely cause little or no concern. If one views polity boundaries more rigidly, many features of multi-site churches will cause concern or even antipathy. Perhaps the best way to understand these reactions is to juxtapose them against one another as they relate to the dominant forms of church polity in use today.

Multi-site churches and Episcopalian polity. The argument has been made that because multi-site churches operate as a single entity with multiple congregations, often placing campus pastors or elders at each of the locations, an Episcopalian governmental structure is created. The senior or lead pastor, because he maintains leadership and oversight over the entire church body, becomes a bishop over the multi-site church or a group of churches. Continuing with this line of reasoning, some contend that the multi-site structure melds together the bishop model with chief executive office

⁴⁴Banks, "Church Order and Government," 132.

(CEO) concept within secular business environs.⁴⁵

In *Franchising McChurch: Feeding Our Obsession with Easy Christianity*,

White and Yeats provide a pithy summary of this position. According to their view:

In the multi-campus churches, the pastor as CEO becomes like a bishop in an Episcopal structure. The bishop (usually with the council) hands down decisions to be enacted in the congregations under his or her authority. The congregants can either affirm the decisions by their continued attendance or leave the church. There is little room for input.

In most multi-campus structures, the campus is simply a branch of the main congregation, so all decisions are ratified and maintained by the pastor and the leadership team. Instead of being an autonomous church that owns its own facilities and practices the New Testament model of submitting to one another in Christ, they are subjected to the external control of a centralized business structure. Offerings taken at the satellite campus are deposited into the main campus's accounts, and the bean counters there determine how much goes back out to meet the needs of the satellite. While this is efficient and provides for cost sharing, the ramifications are huge. Your local congregation has zero control. In function, the multi-campus church is like a hierarchical McDenomination that dictates what each franchise must do.⁴⁶

White and Yeats offer further critique regarding local church autonomy. In their estimation, the multi-site structure debases the local church. They state,

One of the most problematic elements of the multi-site movement is the forfeiture of local church autonomy. The breakdown of the free-church structure, along with its basic theological commitments, leads to other theological issues. The local congregation has given up the right to decide major decisions, placing that authority in the main campus. We do not mean the color of the carpet or how often the light bulb should be changed. The decisions at question are (1) the ability to elect the officers of the church usually called pastors and deacons, (2) the ability to accept members in the congregation, (3) the ability to exclude members from the congregation, and (4) the ability to vote on the use of budgetary funds.⁴⁷

Their assessment correctly highlights problems that can take place within

⁴⁵John Mark Yeats, "Multi-site? Please Press Pause," Baptist Press, 2 June 2009. See also, Neil Cole "The Multi-Site Church Model," Church Multiplication Associates, n. d.

⁴⁶White and Yeats, *Franchising McChurch*, 81-82.

⁴⁷Ibid., 191.

multi-site churches. A pastor can indeed take over the leadership of a church and, with or without a council, can become a church bishop figure usurping all types of decision-making roles generally assigned to his congregation. White and Yeats' concern over a bishop/CEO and his small group of leaders superimposing "centralized business structures" over the body of Christ is equally disconcerting, and the notion of a central church authority unilaterally absorbing and redistributing funds is problematic at best. Each of these issues, as well as any others, in which a single or small group of autocrats dictates operations and edicts to a church body is destined for collapse and ultimate failure.

Within White and Yeats' critique, unfortunately, the authors make several problematic statements that bring their work into question. First, White and Yeats present their discussion as if what they articulate is true of all multi-site churches. They aver that (1) "The congregants can either affirm the decisions by their continued attendance or they can leave,"⁴⁸ (2) "[At the campuses] *all decisions* [emphasis added] are ratified and maintained by the pastor and the leadership team,"⁴⁹ and (3) "The local congregation has given up the right to decide major decisions, placing that authority in the main campus."⁵⁰ If just even a small number of multi-site churches allow all "branch" campuses to have a voice in any decision-making processes (e.g., selection of a campus pastor, building expansion, site selection, church discipline procedures), then White and Yeats have wrongly portrayed multi-site churches.

⁴⁸Ibid., 81.

⁴⁹Ibid., 81.

⁵⁰Ibid., 191.

White and Yeats go on to posit further erroneous arguments within their work. For example, they say, “This movement, while new, has not had many proponents attempt to find a scriptural basis for its existence. Most have pragmatically adopted the model based on the success of increased numbers.”⁵¹ Based on my personal conversations with Larry Osborne (North Coast Church, Vista, California), Dave Browning (Christ the King Community Church, Mount Vernon, Washington), Peter Roebbelen (formerly of Chartwell Baptist Church, Ontario, Canada), and Dave Ferguson (Community Christian Church, Naperville, Illinois), each of these multi-site innovators chose to become multi-site based on scriptural study and prayer.⁵² While these four individuals are not “most” of the multi-site movement, they are leading voices within it. For White and Yeats to say that not many have attempted to find a “scriptural basis” for the multi-site movement, they have assumed a conclusion that (1) has not been proven, and (2) is likely to be wrong.

They also disparage multi-site churches on the basis of multi-site leadership and preaching structures—specifically the senior pastor and campus pastor arrangement: “Without intending to do so, the multi-site movement promotes an air of elitism and discourages the common person from being bold for God. It also diminishes the gospel as the power of God. The men we know involved in this movement do not intend such a message, but they unintentionally encourage such perspectives.”⁵³ This statement is

⁵¹Ibid., 172.

⁵²Larry Osborne, telephone interview by the author, 17 September 2010; Dave Browning, telephone interview by the author, 16 September 2010; Peter Roebbelen, telephone interview by the author, 11 September 2009; Dave Ferguson, telephone interview by the author, 10 September 2006.

⁵³White and Yeats, *Franchising McChurch*, 153.

unsubstantiated at best, and it casts reasonable doubt on the veracity of these authors' contributions.

In the cases above, White and Yeats offer little documentation or research to validate their arguments. Perhaps they will provide ample evidence to support their claims in the future, but until they do, *Franchising McChurch* cannot be utilized reasonably or responsibly to evaluate multi-site churches or the multi-site church movement.

Other multi-site church observers, however, have presented similar concerns. In 2007, Towns, Stetzer, and Bird, with Stetzer as the likely section author, offered the following consideration:

Simply put, the lead pastor becomes a bishop overseeing a series of churches or campus pastors. For some, that is not a problem. But for others, they have not even thought through the issues. This model creates a new view of what the church is, and churches need to give that some serious biblical consideration.⁵⁴

Decades earlier (1990), Elmer Towns offered an optimistic, but cautious evaluation of the extended geographical (multi-site) church. Towns opined:

These early attempts to develop the extended geographical church nearly 2000 years ago usually ended up with bishops over several churches. The mother church usually became a cathedral. In other ages, the attempt ended up in denominational churches, each separate, but all united under one superstructure.

In other words, many have tried to build such churches, but with various results. It remains to be seen if those who are presently trying will succeed. The world is certainly different now, with changes that could never have happened three decades ago. Perhaps these changes will enable current experiments to succeed.⁵⁵

In light of these comments, a brief evaluation of the Episcopalian governance

⁵⁴Elmer Towns, Ed Stetzer, and Warren Bird, *11 Innovations in the Local Church: How Today's Leaders Can Learn, Discern and Move into the Future* (Ventura, CA: Regal, 2007), 94.

⁵⁵Towns, *10 of Today's Most Innovative Churches*, 244.

structure is necessary. Peter Toon introduces “Episcopalianism” in the following way:

While those who hold to an episcopal church polity encompass a wide theological spectrum, what unites them is the use of the term “bishop” (Greek, *episcopos*) to describe a subgroup within the totality of all of its ordained pastors or ministers.

For some, “bishop” is used of the pastor who, in the hierarchy of clergy, is above the deacon and presbyter (= priest) and constitutes an altogether different and higher order of ministry. In this understanding bishops are seen as belonging to the historical episcopate and of being “in apostolic succession.” The Roman Catholic, Orthodox, Eastern, Old Catholic, United (e.g., Church of South India), and Anglican churches, as well as a few national Lutheran churches (e.g., in Scandinavia) ascribed to this view.

In other denominations, including those of a Methodist and Lutheran origin, “bishop” is used of the clergy person who is the superintendent of a general area wherein are multiple parishes and pastors. However, as a bishop-superintendent, he or she is not considered above other clergy in terms of holy hierarchy, divine order/appointment, or unique relation to the apostles and the apostolic age.⁵⁶

Toon’s description breaks episcopalian structures into two groups, what may be referred to as a “high” (former) and “low” (later) forms of the polity.⁵⁷ This differentiation is important regarding multi-site polity, and as such, the two forms will be treated individually.

Essentially, the “high” episcopalian structure demonstrates three core assumptions. First, it operates with an assumed dichotomy of clergy with “different levels of ministry or different levels of ordination.”⁵⁸ As Robert Reymond expounds, “This form of church government calls for a distinct category of church officers, generally known as a priesthood, comprised of archbishops, bishops, and rectors (or

⁵⁶Peter Toon, “Episcopalianism” in *Who Runs the Church? 4 Views on Church Government*, ed. Paul E. Engle and Steven B. Cowan (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2004), 21. See also, Paul F. M. Zahl, “The Bishop-Led or Anglican Polity Affirmed, Weighed, and Defended,” in *Perspectives on Church Government: Five Views of Church Polity*, ed. Chad Owen Brand and R. Stanton Norman (Nashville: B&H, 2004): 209-43.

⁵⁷Allison, “Theological Defense of Multi-site,” 17.

⁵⁸Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 1081.

vicars), to govern the church and to have final authority in decision-making in the local church.”⁵⁹ The latter part of Reymond’s assertion highlights the second core assumption, which is that bishops hold special power or authority over the congregations beneath them as well as lower level clergy, namely deacons and elders of local congregations. The third assumption is that bishops “stand in a long line of priestly succession going back to the original apostles themselves,” enjoying apostolic succession.⁶⁰

While some like White and Yeats may contend that multi-site churches yield episcopal bishops, a brief analysis reveals that such a structure is improbable if not impossible. First, there may be perceived levels of clergy within multi-site churches, but levels of pastoral authority inherent to episcopalian polity are not maintained within multi-site structures.

Second, multi-site pastors do not hold authority over all church matters, as bishops would maintain.⁶¹ Granted, senior pastors and their leadership teams do exercise a great deal of decision-making power and influence. This reality can be true of multiple or single site churches. Multi-site leaders generally do not, however, operate with an assumed spiritual “authority [which] transcends that of ordinary ministers” or the congregation.⁶²

⁵⁹Robert L. Reymond, *A New Systematic Theology of the Christian Faith*, 2nd ed. (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1998), 904.

⁶⁰Ibid., 905.

⁶¹Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 1081-82.

⁶²Ibid., 1081. Consider Elmer Towns’ observation about control and church size as it relates to the idea of one individual controlling a large church: “One constant is that big churches are not controlled churches. The larger the churches become, the less control is exerted by the pastor. The reverse is also true. The more control exerted by the pastor, the smaller the church.” Elmer L. Towns, “The Multi-Congregational Church” in *Evangelism and Church Growth: A Practical Encyclopedia* (Ventura, CA: Regal, 1995), 48.

Third, and perhaps most significantly, multi-site pastors do not claim apostolic succession. Some may view themselves or be labeled as “apostolic” leaders in the sense that they are specifically gifted for extraordinary kingdom-building initiatives, but they would not view themselves as “successors of the apostles,” or what Louis Berkhof labels as “a separate, independent, and self-perpetuating order.”⁶³ Mark Driscoll, the well-known pastor of the multi-site Mars Hill Church, Seattle, Washington, who some might see as a bishop, provides clear validation that his job is terminable. “I am subject to an annual review,” explains Driscoll, and he continues: “Furthermore, I have repeatedly told our people that if the day comes when the elders discipline or fire me, they should trust their elders and submit to them even if I disagree, because the authority resides with the entire team and not just one man, especially me.”⁶⁴

Toon’s “low” episcopalian category (in which a bishop is superintendent over multiple parishes and pastors, but equal in terms of divine authority with other ministers) could be used to draw connection between the Methodist or Lutheran bishops role and the lead pastor of a multi-site church.⁶⁵ The most significant contrast between the “low” bishop and the multi-site leader, however, is that the superintendent functions outside the congregation as a detached leader of several congregations who exercises control

⁶³Easum and Travis use “apostle approach” in this fashion to describe individuals like Dave Ferguson, Community Christian Church, Naperville, IL; Bobby Hill, New Life Christian Fellowship, Chesapeake, VA. Bill Easum and Dave Travis, *Beyond the Box: Innovative Churches that Work* (Loveland, CO: Group, 2003), 86-89; Louis Berkhof, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1941), 579.

⁶⁴Mark Driscoll and Gerry Breshears, *Vintage Church: Timeless Truths and Timely Methods* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2008), 256.

⁶⁵In fact, that connection is exactly the one Lyle Schaller saw in his early assessment of multi-site churches when he identified the fusion of declining churches into multi-site arrangements. Schaller, *Innovations in Ministry*, 121.

externally, while the multi-site leader is an internal, centralized leader of a church guiding by direct influence, communication, and teaching.⁶⁶

Giving no reference to a “high” or “low” type of episcopalian governance, Greg Gilbert weighs in on this discussion. In Gilbert’s estimation, he does not see enough evidence for him to conclude that multi-site church structures are episcopalian. Gilbert states,

What's Episcopalian about it? Really not much, in my opinion. In the church with which I am most familiar, the senior pastor has the authority to fire campus pastors, and everyone agrees that he has enormous influence over the direction of the church. But then again, the senior pastor can't install a campus pastor unilaterally, and senior pastors often have enormous influence over their churches, even in strictly congregational churches. That doesn't quite qualify in my mind as a bishopric.

Indeed, there's quite a lot about the congregational multi-site that is very un-episcopalian. The whole-congregation meeting is the most obvious example, followed closely by the senior pastor's lack of authority to install a campus pastor. There's also the existence of a "leadership team"—you might call it a "board of elders," even—which consists of the senior pastor and all the campus pastors which meets as a group to think, pray, and set direction for the church as a whole. That's much closer to Presbyterianism than to Episcopalianism.⁶⁷

Does the multi-site structure then favor a Presbyterian system, as Gilbert surmises? The focus of the discussion will now turn to this question.

Multi-site churches and Presbyterian polity. Within presbyterian polity, the multi-site approach finds a comfortable fit in both leadership and governance structure.

⁶⁶Admittedly, some multi-site models may be more bishop-like in their arrangement. One of the most vivid examples of bishop-like activity is documented by Surratt, Ligon, and Bird regarding Wayne Cordeiro’s role at New Hope Church, Honolulu, HI: “Some New Hope campuses will likely remain satellites, while others are in the process of becoming independent churches. Each local campus pastor makes the decision in conjunction with Wayne, enabling each campus to follow a model that fits its leadership and leads to maximum growth potential. ‘Some leaders thrive under strong corporate structure, some do better independent, others do best somewhere in between,’ says Mike McGuire, multisite Executive Pastor of New Hope Leeward.” Surratt, Ligon, and Bird, *A Multi-site Road Trip*, 38.

⁶⁷Greg Gilbert, “What Is This Thing, Anyway? A Multi-site Taxonomy,” 29.

To understand how these two concepts relate, a concise explanation of the presbyterian polity is warranted. Robert Saucy provides it:

The Presbyterian form of church government consists in the rulership by the elders (*presbuteros*) as representatives of the church. The local church is governed by the session, which is composed of ruling elders elected by the membership, with the teaching elder or minister as presiding officer. The highest-ranking body is the Presbytery, which includes all the ordained ministers or teaching elders and one ruling elder from each local congregation in a given district. Above the presbytery is the synod, and over the synod is the general assembly, the highest court. Both of these bodies are also equally divided between ministers and laymen or ruling elders.

Although both classes of elders, teaching and ruling, have equal authority, a distinction is usually maintained between their ministries, making the teaching elder the principal order. Teaching elders are ordained by other ministers, while ruling elders are ordained by the local congregation. Furthermore, while the ruling elder assists in the government of the church, the ministry of the Word and sacraments belongs to the teaching elder. It is of utmost importance, however, according to Presbyterianism, to maintain the parity of ministers. They are of equal ministries and there is no third order of ministry above them.⁶⁸

Two aspects of the presbyterian model are especially germane to the multi-site church concept. The first is the concept of the “session,” and the second is the ruling/teaching elder dichotomy.

Within the “session” or “consistory” concept, representative elders are from within a congregation provide leadership over their congregation serving as the “session.”⁶⁹ While the congregation maintains a “voice” in congregational activity (e.g., selecting and appointing elders) and, as Erickson notes, “the principle of participation by the people is preserved,” the power of the local church resides within a small group

⁶⁸Saucy, *The Church in God's Program*, 112. For a more detailed, yet concise explanation of presbyterian governance, see Robert L. Reymond, “The Presbytery-Led Church: Presbyterian Church Government” in *Perspectives on Church Government: Five Views on Church Polity*, ed. Chad Owen Brand and R. Stanton Norman (Nashville: B&H, 2004), 87-138.

⁶⁹Reymond, *A New Systematic Theology of the Christian Faith*, 901; Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, 584. Reymond uses the terms “session” and “consistory” synonymously in his discussion. Ibid.

(session).⁷⁰ Those serving as the session body also serve as representatives for their local congregations within a “presbytery” that is a governing body made up of several sessions united together as one body. Reymond explains further:

The presbytery, composed of representatives from the sessions are the ordained ministers of the churches in a prescribed geographic area, which meets at designated times and exercises oversight over, coordinates work of, and gives advice and council to the several local churches in its area of responsibility.⁷¹

To varying degrees, this type of arrangement seems analogous to typical multi-site structure formats. Functioning as one-man “sessions,” campus pastors gather regularly with one another, and led by the senior form a quasi-presbytery. While congregational participation and voice remain in place for these multi-site congregations, direction and decision-making powers appear to reside in what may be labeled a multi-site presbytery of campus pastors.

Perimeter Church, Atlanta, Georgia, was by no means the archetype of all multi-site churches, but it is clearly one of (if not the) earliest multi-site churches in North America—and a Presbyterian church in both governance and affiliation. Founder Randy Pope’s explanation of the Perimeter Church organization demonstrates cogently how the multi-site/presbyterian structural relationship connects:

Under the former organization of one church and many congregations, Pope was asked, ‘Do you control the other pastors and the other congregations?’ He answered that he did not dictate, but used his influence for direction and quality of ministry.

Pope explains, ‘All the pastors met once a week, and I moderated the meetings.’ He adds, ‘I am the CEO, but I didn’t dictate to them policy and ministry.’ Rather, they met together for correlation, total planning, and major budget approval.

He says that he still influences the congregations by his values, not by programming. Not all of the churches follow the same weekly program.

⁷⁰Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 1088.

⁷¹Reymond, *A New Systematic Theology of the Christian Faith*, 902.

Pope considers each pastor as a teaching elder or leader of leaders. Following the traditional Presbyterian model, the elders have the final responsibility for the church. Pope indicates, ‘We don’t take programs to the elders for their approval. We take ‘people situations’ for them to handle. It is shared problem solving and shared leadership.

The ruling elders establish the policy of the church; the shepherd elders (pastors) pastor the congregation. Each one of the ruling elders has a sphere of ministry for which he is responsible for communicating information, ideas and solutions to problems.⁷²

For Perimeter Church, the government system appears to have moved beyond a single session then toward a Presbytery arrangement, that is individual “sessions” or congregations or churches coming together to form a single Presbytery.⁷³ Typically, the multi-site structure then would not generally extend beyond the session or Presbytery level of governance; no larger or extended, synod, or general assembly is visible within multi-site churches.⁷⁴

Moving to the second concept, the ruling/teaching elder dichotomy seems to be present in the relationship between multi-site campuses and lead pastors. Within the presbyterian system, the teaching elder, who is considered the lead pastor of a session, is

⁷²Towns, *10 of Today’s Most Innovative Churches*, 97-98.

⁷³Pope, however, remained steadfast in his view of Perimeter’s being one local church meeting in multiple locations. As Towns records, “‘I didn’t want to build just one superchurch touching only one socioeconomic group in one part of Atlanta,’ [Pope] says. ‘Instead, I wanted to find a way to impact the whole of the city—reaching far beyond the influence of one church in one location.’ Hence Perimeter Church would be designed to be one, ‘local church,’ but one that meets in many locations. It would have one senior pastor with individual pastors in each congregation, one board made up of three elders from each individual congregation and one program of outreach carried out by each congregation.” Towns, *10 of Today’s Most Innovative Churches*, 90.

Consider Reymond’s definition of presbytery: “The presbytery, composed of representatives from the sessions and the ordained ministers of the churches in a prescribed geographic area, which meets at designated times and exercises oversight over, coordinates work of, and gives advice and counsel to the several local churches in its area of responsibility.” Reymond, *A New Systematic Theology of the Christian Faith*, 902.

⁷⁴See superstructure of “Presbyterian Church Government” offered by Hammett. John S. Hammett, *Biblical Foundations for Baptist Churches: A Contemporary Ecclesiology* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2005), 141.

principally responsible for the Word and the sacraments, and ruling elders generally handle pastoral responsibilities.⁷⁵ In a similar way, in many multi-site arrangements, campus pastors handle pastoral roles at their respective campuses as ruling elders, and the lead pastor of a multi-site church (or in some cases, lead pastors) whether in person or by video assume(s) primary teaching responsibility. The element of equality between ruling (lay) and teaching (clergy) elders also tends to be visible in multi-site arrangements where both campus pastors and the lead pastor are viewed with similar respect at the various sites. This phenomenon is particularly interesting, especially since many campus pastors tend not to be professionally educated clergy.

Before moving forward, it is worth considering that when multi-site churches place teaching elders at their locations, and those campus pastors begin to develop ruling elders around them, they actually (at least in essence) create individual “sessions” at each location. Thus, a presbytery would then come into being, because the campus “teaching” pastors and lead teaching pastor over the multi-site church would gather together to lead and govern the combined sessions (a presbytery) as a whole.

While an episcopalian structure is not as conducive to multi-site structures, the presbyterian governance model connects well with a structure of one church meeting in multiple locations. Will a congregational polity offer similar suitability within a multi-site structure? Some, like Gregg Allison, believe it can.

Multi-site churches and Congregational polity. A congregational polity can be expressed in a variety of forms. Wayne Grudem, for example, offers five different

⁷⁵Saucy, *The Church in God's Program*, 121.

types, including: (1) single elder (or single pastor), (2) plural local elders, (3) corporate board, (4) pure democracy, and (5) “no government but the Holy Spirit.”⁷⁶ Central to any of these congregational forms is a pair of undergirding concepts. Erikson explains,

Two concepts are basic to the congregational scheme: autonomy and democracy. By autonomy we mean that the local congregation is independent and self-governing. There is no external power that can dictate courses of action to the local church. By democracy we mean that every member of the local congregation has a voice in its affairs. It is the individual members of the congregation who possess and exercise authority. Authority is not the prerogative of a lone individual or a select group. Neither a monarchical (episcopal) nor oligarchical (Presbyterian) structure is to take the place of the individual.⁷⁷

As Erikson articulates further, churches utilizing congregational polity operate with the local church congregation serving as “the seat of authority.”⁷⁸

For at least two reasons, these defining attributes of congregational polity create some degree of tension within multi-site church arrangements. First, because multi-site structures entail dividing a single church body into multiple locations, some perceive that a democratically-based governance system cannot function properly, if at all. The key to this concern rests in the belief that a congregation must meet together “as a whole” to worship, seek divine guidance, and to make decisions as a corporate body. Some of those espousing this position argue that multi-site churches (and even multiple services churches) are not one single church, but multiple churches operating as an association of churches.⁷⁹

⁷⁶Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 928-36.

⁷⁷Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 1089.

⁷⁸Ibid.

⁷⁹This issue of congregation division will be dealt with in more detail later in the chapter. For an explanation on this line of rationale, see Mark Dever and Paul Alexander, *The Deliberate Church: Building Your Ministry on the Gospel* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2005), 86-88.

The second tension point comes in how the autonomy of a multi-site church is understood. Some believe that multi-site churches are indeed “one church, meeting in multiple locations” while others, as highlighted above, believe that a multi-site church is actually “multiple churches, meeting in multiple locations.”⁸⁰ If one holds to the former position, church autonomy is settled at the onset. Even if the gatherings of a single church are meeting at multiple locations, the church remains a singular entity. Autonomy problems are negated because the multiple church sites together function as one church.

If one ascribes to the latter position in which each gathering is a distinct or separate church, then congregational polity is violated. This compromise of autonomy occurs because either (1) what is generally considered the hub or mother church exercises authority over one or more campuses (“churches”) or (2) the campuses (“churches”) of a multi-site church function within a presbyterian connectionalism framework in which local churches are connected by common government for the purpose of “mutual accountability, dependency, and submission.”⁸¹

While some ardently protest that multi-site churches pose serious jeopardy to the democracy and autonomy of congregationally governed churches, others have reconciled these concerns. Allison, for example, recognizes validation for multi-site congregationalism in his article, “Theological Defense of Multi-site.” Allison avers,

⁸⁰Grant Gaines, “Exegetical Critique of Multi-Site: Disassembling the Church?” *9Marks eJournal* 6, no. 3 (2009): 45-59; and especially, Jonathan Leeman, “Theological Critique of Multi-site: Leadership Is the Church,” *9Marks eJournal* 6, no. 3 (2009): 50-62.

⁸¹Reymond, *A New Systematic Theology of the Christian Faith*, 900-901. Compare Reymond’s explanation with Gaines’ assertion on connectionalism: “Because multiple sites equal multiple churches, there is actually no such thing as a multi-site church. There are simply multi-*church* groups or associations that are connected under one governing structure and that have chosen to call themselves a multi-site church. In this way, multi-site church structure is nothing new. It is simply connectionalism, and it has been around for generations.” Gaines, “Exegetical Critique of Multi-Site,” 47.

Some multi-site churches do not have any structures above the local church level that exercise authority over the campuses. These would be considered legitimate multi-site congregational churches. In this congregational model of multi-site churches, each campus has its own leadership team (both campus elders and campus deacons) that is responsible for the oversight and full-orbed ministry at that site. In addition, the elders from all the sites meet together regularly as a "council of elders" to share resources, cooperate for high impact ministry, pray together, assist one another in identifying and resolving intrachurch problems, prepare sermons together (in a teaching team model), promote mutual accountability, and the like.⁸²

Matt Chandler, pastor of The Village Church, Flower Mound (Dallas), Texas, offers a similar multi-site formulation that includes both congregationalism and elder-based leadership. From an interview with Chandler, Garrett Wishall recounts,

Regarding ecclesiology, Chandler said he sees three viable models for local church government.

“One, is congregationalism. Two, is elder government. Three, is what you see commonly and that is a strong staff that pretty much runs the church,” he said. “What I have found is where you have all three pieces you tend to have a really healthy church: where you have an elder body, an elder-governing body, like we see in the Scriptures, that sets philosophy, theology and direction; where you have a staff team that handles the outworkings of that philosophy and theology, and where you continue to come to the body and inform, get pushback and create feedback loops. When you have those three heads, you tend to have a very healthy place.”⁸³

To conclude his article, Allison transitions his writing from a discussion of multi-site theory to explaining two models of congregational multi-site churches.

Presently, the models have a nine and a one-year history, respectively. At the time

⁸²Allison, “Theological Defense of Multi-Site,” 17. Note Allison’s perception of connectionalism within multi-site churches: “This element of strong connectionalism among multi-site proponents arises out of an intense longing for cooperation—as strong as it is *for* interdependence as it is *against* the fierce independence and exaggerated autonomy promoted by rugged American individualism in evidenced in a growing number of churches today. I have found that multi-site pastors and churches (1) desire deeply to live life and engage in ministry together, (2) repudiate strongly the fierce autonomy that has typified many independent churches in the past, and (3) reject the formalized structures for cooperation between churches (e.g., local ministerial groups, state associations) that currently exist. Too often, they find these networks bureaucratically heavy-handed, ponderously slow and even incapable of offering realistic help, and staffed by incompetent workers. Thus, they expand their ministries through multi-site churches that enjoy a strong connectionalism.” *Ibid.*, 14.

⁸³Garrett E. Wishall, “Matt Chandler” *Towers* (Southern Baptist Theological Seminary) 8, no. 10 (2010): 3, 6.

Allison wrote his article, the second model was just moving into implementation; it is the initial multi-site formulation of Sojourn Community Church, Louisville, Kentucky.

While lengthy, both model descriptions will be included here for consideration.

Model #1: Traditional Southern Baptist Multi-Site Church

Model one is a traditional Southern Baptist church—Highview Baptist Church in Louisville, Kentucky. It is one church with six locations. Its governmental structure has one senior pastor [Kevin Ezell], a group of pastors (composed of the lead pastor from each of the other campuses), one deacon body (composed of representatives from all of the campuses), several committees (finance, personnel, grounds, nominations; each committee is composed of representatives from all of the campuses), one budget, and one congregation that engages in accepting new members, excommunicating sinful members through church discipline, voting on official business, etc.

This one congregation meets together quarterly for Sunday Night Celebrations that include worship, baptisms, the Lord's Supper, business meeting, and so forth. The pastoral team meets together weekly for sermon preparation, site updates, mutual accountability, prayer, and more. There are also weekly ministry meetings for the pastors leading (at all of the campuses) children's ministries, student ministries, adult ministries, and worship.

Model #2: Elder-led, Deacon-served, Congregational Multi-site Church for City Reaching

This second model would constitute my own proposal. Under the sovereign direction of Jesus Christ, its head, the church is led by a plurality of elders. This council is composed of the elders from the various sites. As a team, they are responsible for teaching, leading, praying, and shepherding the church, which exists in multiple locations. Some of these elders may be paid, while others are not. Some may preach and teach at the various campuses, while others have a specific campus assignment. But all shoulder together the leadership for the entire church in the areas designated as their responsibilities. Coming together regularly, the elders support one another in prayer, share ministerial resources, encourage personal accountability, prepare sermons together, address intrachurch problems, distribute monies from a shared budget, and the like.

The church is served by deacons. Whereas the office of eldership is dedicated to the work of teaching, leading, praying, and shepherding, the deaconate is devoted to serving in all other areas of the church. These areas may include men's and women's ministries, youth and children's ministries, worship ministries, sports and fine arts ministries, bereavement and mercy ministries, evangelism and mission ministries, and many more. Deacons are campus-specific; that is, they engage in their ministries at particular sites and not system-wide.

As a congregational church, it is elder led, not elder ruled. The elders work

with authority in their sphere of responsibilities (noted above), and the congregation—which exists at multiple sites—works with authority in its sphere of responsibilities, which includes confirming the elders, receiving new members, excommunicating sinful members through church discipline, affirming the budget, approving any major changes to the constitution and the philosophy of ministry, and doing whatever else is designated as their responsibilities. Regular congregational meetings, which bring together all the members from the various campuses, exhibit and foster unity among members, display and promote strong connectionalism between the various sites, provide opportunities for members to discharge their congregational responsibilities, model the pattern of the early churches, and so forth.

The church exists in multiple locations for the purpose of city reaching. Accordingly, there is a geographical limitation placed on the multi-site church, which is the city the church is attempting to reach with the gospel and its ministries. Its strong sense of missional identity translates into the church as a whole reaching out to the city's residents, including adding other sites to expand the church's reach into heretofore outlying areas of the city.⁸⁴

Having surveyed the primary church polity forms as they relate to multi-site church structures, the discussion will now turn toward providing guidance for developing multi-site church polity. Thus, two parameters for multi-site church polity will be suggested.

Suggested Polity Parameters for Multi-Site Churches

While definitive evidence is not yet available to determine a consensus polity structure among multi-site churches, some hybrid form of presbyterian connectionalism and elder-led congregationalism is recognizable within most multi-site churches.⁸⁵ This reality is not necessary based on polity preferences per se. Rather, it stems from the

⁸⁴Allison, “Theological Defense of Multi-Site,” 17-18. Also consider Hammett’s designation of the Highview Model as “A Workable Model?” Hammett, “Have We Ever Seen This Before? Multi-site Precedents,” 33.

⁸⁵If Leadership Network were to present a polity question (or series of questions) on their next survey of multi-site churches, respondents would most probably identify their individual governances as presbyterian, congregational, or some combination of both.

nature of a single church distributed over multiple locations and the leadership structure required to support it.⁸⁶ Because most multi-site churches operate within the framework of a campus pastor serving as an overseeing or “ruling” elder over a specific location (campus) with a senior pastor or a “teaching elder” providing preaching to the entire body (location), the result is a limited or minimalistic presbyterian structure. This arrangement seems particularly evident in situations where there is only one teaching elder or pastor, as opposed to preaching structures where a group of two or more teaching pastors share preaching responsibilities.

At the same time, churches that demonstrate this eldership-led connectional structure often display a strong proclivity toward congregational rule.⁸⁷ Thus, the question of multi-site organization may best be answered by saying that it is both one polity “and” another, rather than it being an “either/or” issue.⁸⁸

Though an admitted novice in the field of multi-site churches, Greg Gilbert probably best summarizes succinctly the conundrum of multi-site church polity. He concludes,

⁸⁶See Joel C. Hunter’s appraisal of how to “Build Right Governance” within a distributed church system. Joel C. Hunter, *Church Distributed: How the Church Can Thrive in the Coming Era of Connection* (Longwood, FL: Distributed Church Press, 2007), 131-33.

⁸⁷Examples include Mars Hill Church, Seattle, WA; Christ the King Community Church, Mount Vernon, WA; Highview Baptist Church, Louisville, KY; and Sojourn Community Church, Louisville, KY. See also Towns, *10 of Today’s Most Innovative Churches*, 241; Driscoll and Breshears, *Vintage Church*, 255; and Browning, *Deliberate Simplicity*, 149-50.

⁸⁸The “genius of the AND,” was introduced and popularized by Collins and Porras. James C. Collins and Jerry I. Porras, *Built to Last: Successful Habits of Visionary Companies* (San Francisco: HarperCollins, 1994), 44-45. Ferguson utilized the “AND” motif in his multi-site explanation. Ferguson, “The Multi-site Church,” 2-4. Cf. these with Halter and Smay’s recent publication found within the “Exponential Series” from Zondervan: Hugh Halter and Matt Smay, *AND: The Gathered and Scattered Church* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2010); Hunter’s advocacy of the “various . . . so that . . .” paradigm. Hunter, *Church Distributed*, 135; and Browning’s dueling chaps. “The Fallacy of Either/Or” and “The Beauty of Both/And,” Dave Browning, *The Hybrid Church: The Fusion of Intimacy and Impact* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2010), 31-58, 59-70.

What we finally end up labeling the polity of a multi-site church is not an earth-shakingly important question. What's important, above all, is what the Bible teaches about how churches should be structured. Under that is what will tend to the building up of the saints

But I think there *is something* important about this question of polity, however, and that's the simple question of accuracy. In the end, I think it would serve this whole conversation well if we could all agree that multi-site churches are simply not "just as congregational" as any other congregational church. The fact is, they're doing something fairly unique. Maybe that's fine; maybe not. Advocates of multi-site churches should make their case from the house churches of Jerusalem and Rome, critics can fire back, and we can all have long, fun, raucous arguments in between convention sermons about the myriad practicalities involved here. But what we can't do, I think, is cram multi-site polity into any existing, already-well-defined category—whether presbyterian, Episcopalian, or congregational. It just won't fit.⁸⁹

It is very possible indeed that what is developing in multi-site churches of this era is a novel polity altogether. At a point in history when communication technologies are increasing exponentially and the limitations of distance are decreasing similarly, it may be that our current milieu will see the birth of a new church polity structure, or in Gilbert's words, "something fairly unique."

Parameter 1: Congregational involvement in corporate decision-making.

Assuming that congregational polity is the most biblically tenable of available church polity formulations, two parameters will now be offered here to help ensure continued health in multi-site church governance. First, because Scriptures clearly demonstrate the full involvement of all church members in the life and activity of the church, every effort should be made to include all right standing members of the multi-site congregation in primary decision-making processes, such as matters of church membership, church

⁸⁹Gilbert, "What Is This Thing, Anyway? A Multi-site Taxonomy," 30.

discipline, budgeting, building programs, and staff leadership selection, for example.⁹⁰

Parameter 2: Distance minimization between multi-site pastoral team(s).

Second, every reasonable effort should be made to limit the distance between the pastors (elders of all types) and the congregation distributed over its multiple locations. What will help protect a multi-site church from becoming truly episcopalian or presbyterian in polity are the intentional efforts of multi-site pastoral leaders to remain intimately involved in the life and ministry of the congregation wherever the various pastors and sites locate. By functioning within the body, as opposed to outside or above it, leaders will avoid the danger of adopting a bishop-like monarchy or a presbyterian oligarchy.

Even with the issue of multi-site polity addressed, as alluded to above, some believe that a multi-site church is a philosophically absurd idea. Much of this critique derives from the meaning of the word “church” or *ekklesia*. In the section to follow, the idea of assembly will be unpacked carefully in order to navigate the next tension point within the multi-site church formulation: “How do we divide a congregation?”

Fellowshipping (Gathering): How Do We Distribute a Congregation?

Intrinsic to the multi-site church arrangement is the distribution of a single church entity into more than one location, specifically in terms of worship gathering. Therefore, for any church to be a multi-site church, it must diffuse or distribute itself (a singular church body) into multiple worship gatherings whether at one site (via multiple venues) or across multiple locations (sites or campuses). This notion of congregational

⁹⁰Compare with R. Stanton Norman, *The Baptist Way: Distinctives of a Baptist Church* (Nashville: B&H, 2005), 104-06.

diffusion and its possible implications cause serious concern for some and little concern for others. Nevertheless, it remains a pertinent issue within the biblical and theological evaluation of multi-site churches.

Does a Multi-Site Church Constitute Multiple Churches?

In the view of Mark Dever, who serves as senior pastor of Capitol Hill Baptist Church, Washington, DC, and president of the 9Marks organization, the division of a single church into multiple worship services or multiple sites contradicts the NT meaning and pattern of church or *ekklesia*.⁹¹ Speaking about churches using a multiple worship format, Dever explains,

Recognizing wide room for disagreement, enjoying close fellowship with churches that have multiple Sunday services, and experiencing the logistical difficulties that sometimes make multiple services seem inevitable, we are still reluctant to use a multiple service format for the Sunday morning gathering.

⁹¹Dever approaches the discussion with credibility. He holds a Doctor of Philosophy in Ecclesiastical History from Cambridge University, and he has written or co-authored several works on or related to ecclesiology, including: Mark Dever, *9Marks of a Healthy Church*, rev. ed. (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2004); Mark Dever and Paul Alexander, *The Deliberate Church: Building Your Ministry on the Gospel* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2005); Mark Dever, *The Message of the New Testament: Promises Kept* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2005); Idem, *What is a Healthy Church?* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2007); *12 Challenges Churches Face* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2008); and Jonathan Leeman and Mark Dever, *The Church and the Surprising Offense of God's Love: Reintroducing the Doctrines of Church Membership and Discipline* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2010).

The mission of 9Marks is “to equip church leaders with a biblical vision and practical resources for displaying God's glory to the nations through healthy churches.” “What is 9Marks?” 9Marks [on-line]; accessed 12 November 2010; available from <http://www.9marks.org/about/who-9marks>; Internet. In terms of organization's focus and goals, “9Marks believes the local church is the focal point of God's plan for displaying his glory to the nations, and that the Bible is sufficient for the life of the church. As an organization, therefore, we are church-focused, scripture-focused, and pastor-focused. We value a multiplicity of voices and styles as well as like-minded partnerships. We hope to continue growing in our own knowledge of God's Word and its application to the local congregation. And we intend to spread our content through existing venues, platforms, and institutions, not to create new ones.

The nine marks are (1) expositional preaching, (2) biblical theology, (3) a biblical understanding of the good news, (4) a biblical understanding of conversion, (5) a biblical understanding of evangelism, (6) biblical church membership, (7) biblical church discipline, (8) biblical discipleship and growth, and (9) biblical church leadership. These are not the only things which are necessary for building healthy churches, they are nine practices which many churches today overlook and that need to be emphasized once again.” Ibid.

The main reason is that the church is just that—a gathering. The Greek word for “church” is *ekklesia*, which in the New Testament also refers to a single gathering of people who are not the people of God. By definition and by use, an *ekklesia* is a corporate singularity—one group of people who are all in the same place at the same time. The very definition of the word “church,” then, makes it difficult to embrace multiple services as a format for the main weekly “gathering” of church members.⁹²

Dever continues by submitting a series of pensive questions to his reader.⁹³ His final inquiry illumines what could be a quagmire for every church that operates with anything beyond one worship gathering for an entire congregation. Dever queries, “Might multiple gatherings actually constitute multiple churches?”⁹⁴

Dever argues concisely that a singular gathering of the entire church body is the most favorable approach to structuring congregational worship, citing NT examples of “corporate togetherness”(Acts 2:44, 46; 5:12; 15:22; and 1 Cor 14:23) and “corporate unities” (Acts 20:28; 1 Cor 12:14-27; and Eph 2:19-22).⁹⁵ In his conclusion, however, Dever stops short of disallowing multiple worship services for other churches. He concedes that his view on multiple worship gatherings is a “persuasion-level belief” and not one over which “to fracture church unity.”⁹⁶

Grant Gaines, a contributing author to the 9Marks eJournal on multi-site churches, presses beyond Dever’s stated position, stridently arguing against the very

⁹²Dever and Alexander, *The Deliberate Church*, 87.

⁹³These questions are as follows: “Are multiple gatherings the best way to reflect the corporate unity or singularity of the people of God? Are they the best way to facilitate the singular gathering of the people of God in the same place at the same time? Might multiple gatherings actually constitute multiple churches?” Ibid.

⁹⁴Ibid.

⁹⁵Ibid., 87-88.

⁹⁶Ibid., 88.

existence of multi-site churches.⁹⁷ In his article, “Exegetical Critique of Multi-site: Disassembling the Church?,” Gaines contends that a multi-site church cannot be a single church:

The multi-site church structure is outside the bounds of the New Testament's teaching on the local church in at least two ways. First, it violates the biblical understanding of church as assembly . . . by considering a group of believers a church even though they never actually assemble. Second, it violates the biblical understanding of a particular local assembly as a full-fledged manifestation of the one heavenly assembly . . . by not considering each local assembly a church in and of itself, and by subjugating local assemblies to the governmental authority of other local assemblies without biblical warrant for such a practice. Simply put, multiple sites equal multiple churches

*Because multiple sites equal multiple churches, there is actually no such thing as a multi-site church [emphasis added]. There are simply multi-church [emphasis original] groups or associations that are connected under one governing structure and that have chosen to call themselves a multi-site church.*⁹⁸

⁹⁷9Marks eJournal 6, no. 3 (2009). Ed Stetzer, when appraising this article and others found within “Arguing against Multi-site Church” section of the May/June 2009 9Marks eJournal on Multi-site Churches, states, “much of the criticisms in [these] articles assume too much about churches (if we’re allowed to call them that) that have gone multi-site.” Ed Stetzer, “9Marks and Multi-site Churches,” Ed Stetzer: The LifeWay Research Blog [on-line]; accessed 26 September 2010; available from <http://www.edstetzer.com/2009/05/9-marks-and-multi-site-churche.html>; Internet.

In his writings, Gaines demonstrates minimal interaction with multi-site church literature beyond other articles found with the 9Marks eJournal on multi-site churches and Surratt, Ligon, and Bird’s, *Multi-Site Church Revolution*, McConnell’s, *Multi-site Churches*, and Ahlen and Thomas’ *One Church, Many Congregations*. Nothing in Gaines’ work reveals more than a basic and theoretical familiarity with the multi-site church concept and its models.

Gaines is currently pursuing a Doctor of Philosophy degree in systematic theology at The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary. To date, he has written two other doctoral papers in opposition to the multi-site church concept, which include, Grant Gaines, “Were New Testament House Churches Multi-site?” (Doctoral paper, The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, n.d.) [on-line]; accessed 12 November 2010; available from <http://grantgaines.wordpress.com/writings/>; Internet; and Idem, “Is Multi-site Baptist? An Examination of Some Early Scattered Baptist Churches and the Question of Baptist Identity” (doctoral paper, The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, n.d.); accessed 12 November 2010; available from <http://grantgaines.wordpress.com/writings/>; Internet.

⁹⁸Grant Gaines, “Exegetical Critique of Multi-Site, 47. Gaines explains further concern (or disdain) for the multi-site concept. He states, “In this way, multi-site church structure is nothing new. It is simply connectionalism, and it has been around for generations. It is my hunch that this confusion in terms—namely, calling something a multi-site church when it is in reality an association of multiple churches united under one governing structure—is the reason this model has been able to fly under the radar of congregationalists for the past twenty to thirty years. If the multisite structure could be described to any number of congregationalists from the past, they would recognize it as something very similar to something in between presbyterian or episcopalian connectionalism, depending on the exact model of the multi-site church (one pastor only on video? Different campus pastors?). But since many congregationalists lost interest in ecclesiology in the twentieth century, and are only now seeming to regain

Jonathan Leeman, the director of communications for 9Marks and the editor of the 9Marks eJournal, affirms Gaines' position. In his article entitled, "Theological Critique of MultiSite [*sic*]: Leadership Is the Church," Leeman succinctly surmises:

Neither the multi-site church nor the multi-service church is a church. Both are an association of churches, since one essential element of what constitutes a church as a particular church on earth is a gathering. And in that regard, the multi-site and the multi-service churches are no different. One divides its gatherings geographically while the other divides them chronologically.⁹⁹

For Dever, Gaines, Leeman, as well as individuals like Thomas White and John Mark Yeats, appropriate and correct corporate worship can occur only when an entire church body is gathered or assembled in one location at one time.¹⁰⁰ According to this position then, when any church body is divided for corporate worship, by time or by location, multiple churches result. Hence, churches with multiple services and multi-site worship gatherings are considered inappropriate and incorrect expressions of "church" because they do not gather the full assembly of the church for worship.

The Limits of Assembly as the Essence of Church

In response to this singular gathering line of reasoning and with specific focus on multi-site church arrangements, multi-site practitioner Daniel Montgomery, pastor of Sojourn Church, Louisville, Kentucky, offers pointed rebuttal. In the 2009 "Perspectives on Multi-site Churches" forum at The Southern Baptist Seminary, Louisville, Kentucky,

an interest in it, contemporary congregationalists have been unable to spot connectionalism when they see it; especially when it is given a misleading name." Ibid.

⁹⁹Leeman, "Theological Critique of Multi-Site," 50.

¹⁰⁰White and Yeats critique divided worship gatherings in *Franchising McChurch*. For examples see: White and Yeats, *Franchising McChurch*, 80, 102-03; and White, "Nine Reasons I Don't Like Multi-site Churches," 42.

Montgomery challenged single gathering proponent Greg Gilbert on his belief that assembling an entire corporate body for worship is required because of the definition of *ekklesia*. Montgomery argued, “I think you are making too much of assembly, and you are importing too much there that just is not there. I think that’s what is dangerous.... My emphasis is not so much on assembly, but on ‘Who are those people?’ The assembly is a part of that, but it is not the essence.”¹⁰¹

J. D. Greear, senior pastor of The Summit Church, a multi-site church in Durham, North Carolina, resonates with Montgomery’s position. While Greear affirms the importance of congregational assembly for worship, he rejects the assertion that the “manner of assembly” is “the essence of a local church.”¹⁰² Greear writes,

Some argue that since a local church is by definition an *assembly*, a multi-site strategy fundamentally skews the nature of a local church. The essence of a New Testament local church, however, is not "assembly" but "covenant body." If the local church is essentially an assembly, then it only exists when it assembles and only when all the members are present. "Assembly" is a much-needed function, but "covenant" is the essence.

The New Testament nowhere demands that a local church meet all together each week. Nor is a single-service assembly the only model given in Acts. While it is certainly true that we see evidences of local churches assembling all together (1 Corinthians 11), we also see evidence of single local churches which met in multiple locations. The new congregation in Jerusalem is frequently referred to in the singular, one "church" (Acts 8:1; 11:22; 15:4). However, they obviously had to meet in different times and locations. Historians tell us there was no space in Jerusalem available to the disciples in which three thousand or more people could have met on a weekly basis. It also appears that many first-century house churches came together to celebrate the Lord's Supper as one citywide church (see 1 Cor

¹⁰¹Daniel Montgomery, “Panel - Perspectives on Multi-site Churches,” panel interview by R. Albert Mohler (The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 3 November 2009) [on-line]; accessed 25 September 2010; available from <http://www.sbts.edu/resources/chapel/chapel-fall-2009/panel-discussion-perspectives-on-multi-site-churches/>; Internet. Other panel interviewees included (1) Greg Gilbert, Assistant Pastor, Capitol Hill Baptist Church, Washington, DC; (2) Kevin Ezell, former senior pastor of Highview Baptist Church, Louisville, KY, who now serves as president of the North American Mission Board, Atlanta, GA; and (3) Gregg Allison, professor of Christian Theology, The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, Louisville, KY.

¹⁰²Greear, “A Pastor Defends His Multi-Site Church,” 21.

11:17–20; Romans 16:5). Quite simply, the New Testament neither demands nor uniformly models that all members of one local church are to assemble weekly in the same place.¹⁰³

In reality, those in the 9Marks camp who would limit every *ekklesia* to a single worship gathering hold a minority position.¹⁰⁴ Even R. Albert Mohler, who is closely connected with Mark Dever and the 9Marks ministry, rejects the position that a church must gather its congregation into only one worship service.¹⁰⁵ While facilitating the “Perspectives on Multi-site Churches” panel, Mohler targeted his attention on Gilbert and pressed for a clear answer to what Mohler considers the prime question of multi-site corporate gatherings. Mohler asked, “What is it that is demanded in a New Testament ecclesiology that is either absent or compromised in a multi-site church?”¹⁰⁶ In response, Gilbert returned to his definition of *ekklesia*, arguing unconvincingly that a singular gathering is what Scriptures require.

Those, like Gilbert, who reject multiple service worship and multiple-site

¹⁰³Ibid., 21-22.

¹⁰⁴The assumption is not made here that a minority view necessarily indicates a position is wrong because it lacks supporters. At the same time, caution should be exercised in evaluating a biblical or theological position that is rejected by a majority. Seemingly, those who reject the multi-site church arrangement because it allegedly lessens assembly are fewer in number than those who advocate (or allow) multi-site church approaches.

¹⁰⁵Mohler is a member of Highview Baptist Church, Louisville, KY, which employs a multi-site church structure. In terms of connections between Mohler and 9Marks, there are at least three ties. First, several 9Marks staff members and eJournal contributors hold (or are pursuing) degrees from The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary (SBTS), including: Jonathan Leeman, Bobby Jamieson, Grant Gaines, Greg Gilbert, and Mark Dever. “Our Staff,” 9Marks [on-line]; accessed 13 November 2010; available from <http://www.9marks.org/about/our-staff>; Internet. Second, Mark Dever has served on the Board of Trustees for SBTS. “Mark Dever,” 9Marks [on-line]; accessed 13 November 2010; available from <http://www.9marks.org/about/mark-dever>; Internet. Third, Mohler and Dever have worked closely since 2006 to facilitate and lead the biannual “Together for the Gospel” Conference. “About us,” Together for the Gospel [on-line]; accessed 13 November 2010; available from <http://t4g.org/aboutus/>; Internet.

¹⁰⁶R. Albert Mohler, “Panel - Perspectives on Multi-site Churches,” panel interview by R. Albert Mohler (The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 3 November 2009); accessed 25 September

worship gathering as a violation of the biblical worship standard develop their argument based primarily on the meaning and definition of *ekklesia*. Thus by using one word (*ekklesia*) with multiple meanings in the NT, proponents of this “single gathering” position develop an ecclesiological requirement (mandate) that is not explicitly, nor implicitly mandated within the biblical text.¹⁰⁷ Robert Bank’s explanation of *ekklesia* demonstrates why this approach is problematic. Banks says,

Paul’s predominate usage of *ekklesia* to refer to the actual gatherings of Christians, or the group conceived as gathering regularly, means that *the word is less theologically significant than people generally assume* [emphasis added]. Its chief importance lies in the way it stresses the centrality of meeting for community life: it is through gathering that the community comes into being and it is continually re-created The word *ekklesia* brings us to the threshold of his understanding; it does not carry us over it.¹⁰⁸

If Banks is correct that there is danger in overstressing the theological significance of *ekklesia* as gathering, then “single gathering” proponents are overstepping the boundaries of what Scriptures require concerning corporate worship. Nowhere do the Scriptures say that a single church cannot meet in multiple worship gatherings. In fact, the biblical pattern of worship gathering leans strongly in the opposite direction.

The Nature of “Gathering” in New Testament *Ekklesia*

According to NT scholar Robert Banks, the framework of church gatherings in the New Testament era was very different from contemporary worship settings in North

2010; available from <http://www.sbts.edu/resources/chapel/chapel-fall-2009/panel-discussion-perspectives-on-multi-site-churches/>; Internet.

¹⁰⁷For further discussion on the range of meanings related to *ekklesia*, see Ladd, *A Theology of the New Testament*, 582; and P. T. O’Brien, “Church,” in *Dictionary of Paul and His Letters*, ed. Gerald Moore and Ralph P. Martin (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1993), 123-26.

¹⁰⁸Banks, *Paul’s Idea of Community*, 46; see also, Ladd, *A Theology of the New Testament*, 579; and especially his comments on Paul’s organic versus numeric understanding of *ekklesia*. *Ibid.*, 582.

America. Evidence of this reality is visible in a number of areas. First, corporate worship gatherings generally took place in homes of believers, not in “church” buildings set aside specifically for corporate worship.¹⁰⁹ Most homes of the era would likely have held “thirty people comfortably,” but larger homes (of wealthy church members) might have held “forty to forty-five people” in a single room, with a maximum of ninety people in a single home gathered in multiple rooms.¹¹⁰

Second, as Banks articulates, “ We are still not clear whether the weekly meetings were of all the Christians or of the smaller groups. Paul’s rather vague way of referring to meetings of the whole Church suggests that it met less than once a week.”¹¹¹ Regarding the church at Corinth specifically, Gehring adds that these smaller groups likely met more often while the larger gatherings met “less often but regularly.”¹¹² Unlike the normative practice of weekly, full congregational worship gatherings found in most North American churches today, NT era churches functioned with fluidity and flexibility in worship gathering.

Third, full-time, vocational clergy were absent. Pastors “were not full-time professionals in the church but part-time servants who occasionally received, but did not

¹⁰⁹Gehring verifies, “On one point nearly all New Testament scholars presently agree: early Christians met almost exclusively in the homes of individual members of the congregation. For nearly 300 years—until the fourth century, when Constantine began building the first basilicas throughout the Roman empire—Christians gathered in private houses built initially for domestic use, not in church buildings originally constructed for the sole purpose of public worship.” Gehring, *House Church and Mission*, 1. See also Banks, *Paul’s Idea of Community*, 35.

¹¹⁰Banks, *Paul’s Idea of Community*, 35.

¹¹¹Ibid., 34.

¹¹²Gehring, *House Church and Mission*, 142.

necessarily depend upon, reimbursement for their efforts.”¹¹³ Churches were not an established institution requiring the supervision of property and programs. Instead, they were organic entities, founded and maintained by lay leadership. These three unique features of NT era churches, among others, led to a system of ecclesiological relationships and gatherings (“church”) that was “distinctly dynamic rather than static in character.”¹¹⁴

In terms of a singular format or common pattern of *ekklesia* meetings, Van Gelder provides further clarification: “The material in the New Testament that speaks directly to the development of conventional processes and assembly in the visible church is sketchy. What appears is the church being created by the Spirit that organizationally adapted itself to its context.”¹¹⁵ Mark Driscoll and Gerry Breshears reason similarly: “The early church was quite flexible, meeting and worshiping in distinctive situations to meet the needs and opportunities of their time.”¹¹⁶

¹¹³Banks, “Church Order and Government,” 135; cf. with Hadaway, Wright, and DuBose’s discussion on “The Function and Structure of the New Testament Church.” Hadaway, Wright, and DuBose, *Home Cell Groups and House Churches*, 59-69.

¹¹⁴Banks, *Paul’s Idea of Community*, 35.

¹¹⁵Van Gelder, *The Essence of the Church*, 175. Note Ladd’s assessment of church forms throughout “Pauline cities”: “The form of the church in a given city is not clear. The Corinthian correspondence suggests that all believers in Corinth gathered together in one place (1 Cor 14:23). Acts refers to gatherings in upper rooms and private houses (Acts 1:13; 12:12; 20:8), but it is difficult to believe that such a meeting place would be large enough to accommodate all the Christians in a given city. Archaeology confirms that for the first three centuries, the meeting place of Christians was private homes, not distinctive church buildings. Sometimes an entire house would be set aside for the Christian gatherings. On the other hand, Paul refers to ‘house churches,’ i.e., to groups of believers who gathered together in a particular house (Rom. 16:5; 1 Cor 16:19; Col. 4:15; Phlm. 2; see also Rom. 16:14, 15). There were probably enough Christians in each of the large Pauline cities to constitute several house churches. These facts leave the outward form of the local church rather unclear.” Ladd, *A Theology of the New Testament*, 577.

¹¹⁶Driscoll and Breshears, *Vintage Church*, 244. Consider Hammett’s explanation: “The idea of local church must be seen with some flexibility. While a group small enough to meet in a house is called a church (Rom. 16:5; Col. 4:15), Paul also consistently refers to the church in a *city* in the singular (the

It is evident from NT sources that the early church met both in large and small gatherings and that both were identified as *ekklesia*. Focusing on the Jerusalem church specifically, Towns identifies this arrangement as the “cell and celebration” church model:

The church at Jerusalem was one church (Acts 8:1), yet it was made up of several parts, or units. The Jerusalem church is described as a unit: ‘the multitude of those who believed were of one heart and soul’ (Acts 4:32). Note that the word ‘multitude’ is singular; the church was one entity.

Yet later we are told that ‘believers were the more added to the Lord, multitudes, both men and women’ (Acts 5:14). Here ‘multitudes’ is plural, describing more than one entity. These were probably groups of classes of people within the Jerusalem church.

The Jerusalem church was one large group (celebration), and many smaller groups (cells).¹¹⁷

Gehring’s work, *House Church and Mission*, validates Towns’ findings, positing that

church in Cenchreae or Philippi or Corinth, the church of the Thessalonians; see Rom. 16:11; 1 Cor 1:2; Phil. 4:15; 1 Thess. 1:1), but to the churches in a *region* in the plural (the churches of Galatia or Asia or Macedonia; see 1 Cor 16:1, 19; 2 Cor 8:1). Hammett, *Biblical Foundations for Baptist Churches*, 29.

¹¹⁷Towns, *10 of Today’s Most Innovative Churches*, 242-43. In a separate source, Towns uses the “cell and celebration” model to build a case for the “geographical extended church.” Towns explains: “The biblical argument for the geographical extended church is tentative, yet strong enough to forbid ruling out the idea of a church having several campus sites in one city. The growth of the Jerusalem/Judea church implies a church reaching a large geographic area, perhaps through extension missions. The Great Commission calling on the Church to make disciples of *pante ta ethne* may best be fulfilled by establishing ethnic missions. The use of both singular and plural forms of the word multitude(s) may suggest several large groups under one banner, as in extension mission model. Smaller groups such as house churches may also have been extension missions. The existence of groups of Christians in Rome, Corinth, and other places, along with such expressions as the Church of Christ (i.e., Messianic Synagogues) and the Churches of the Gentiles (i.e., predominately Gentile churches), may suggest the existence of socioeconomic or culturally base extension missions. Also, the term ‘elder’ is plural in the New Testament, whereas the term ‘bishop’ is singular. Many elders may have been responsible for extension ministries under the supervision of one bishop.” Towns, “Church-Planting Models,” 104.

As might be expected, those arguing for the “single gathering” position patently reject this understanding. Gaines, for example, states, “In regard to passages such as Acts 2:46 (‘breaking bread from house to house’) as well as the several references to ‘house-churches’ (Rom. 16:5; 1 Cor 16:19; Col. 4:15; Philem. 2), it should be noted that the former instance by no means supports a ‘one church in many locations’ model, especially since verse 44 states that they were also meeting ‘in the same place’ (*epi to auto*, my translation). Rather, it simply states that they broke bread together in various homes. In the instance of house-churches, it is significant that these are always considered ‘churches’ and not mere ‘campuses,’ ‘sites,’ or any other word denoting a portion of a church. A citywide church consisting of multiple house-churches is not in view in Corinth and is never mentioned in Scripture.” Gaines, “Exegetical Critique of Multi-Site,” 46. Understandably, “sites” and “campuses” of a multi-site church would not be

from “the earliest days of the primitive church, a plurality of house churches existed alongside the local church as a whole in Jerusalem.”¹¹⁸

Jerusalem, however, was not the only place where the side-by-side coexistence of these forms was visible. Gehring opines that this arrangement was in operation at Rome, Corinth, and possibly other locations. He explains,

It is almost certain that a plurality of house churches existed in Rome, each with a different orientation (Rom 16). Because of the size of the city and a large number of groups there, it is highly unlikely that all Roman Christians met regularly at one place as the whole local church (Klauck, Lampe). Christians met in different private homes in Corinth as well. Paul, however, places a high value on a regular assembly of the whole local church there; accordingly we can assume that it happened. It can be asked whether the regular gathering of the whole church was to celebrate the Lord’s Supper. It appears that the transition between house church and local church regarding the content of the worship service was fluid (Klauck). In any case, we can be certain that a plurality of house churches existed alongside the whole local church in Corinth. There are indications of a plurality of house churches as well in Antioch, Thessalonica, Ephesus, Philippi, and Laodicea.¹¹⁹

Some may still reject the idea that house church gatherings were equal in value and status to the full gathering of the entire church in a city. To relegate house churches to a

found within Scripture, as this matter would create an anachronism. The “‘one church in many locations’ model” is a category developed only recently (circa AD 1980).

¹¹⁸Gehring, *House Church and Mission*, 89. See Gehring’s discussion of “the church that establishes itself in a house like manner.” Ibid., 24-25; and cf. it with Hammett’s conclusions on the NT allowing “both megachurches and microchurches.” Hammett, *Biblical Foundations for Baptist Churches*, 319.

Additionally, Gehring’s definitions of the NT church gathering patterns are helpful in both defining and understanding NT church categories. Gehring explains, “A *house church* is a group of Christians that meets in a private home. A *local church* consists of all the Christians to gather at a geographically definable location (e.g., town or city). The terms “local church” and “house church” refer to the same group only if there is just one single house church gathering at that specific location. We [Gehring and his audience] will use the term “whole local church” or “whole Church at one location” to refer to the whole Church in one locality. This term already implies a plurality of individual house churches for that location. The term ‘universal church’ will as usual, be reserved for the worldwide body of Christians.” Ibid., 27.

¹¹⁹Ibid., 296; and see *ibid.*, 225.

lower level of *ekklesia*, however, would be erroneous.¹²⁰ While both types of gatherings were valuable for different reasons, the smaller *ekklesia* was an environment in which the gospel (and its implications) were not only proclaimed corporately, but also lived out within the community life of the early church.¹²¹ If the Jerusalem church set the precedent for how large and small gatherings functioned in tandem, then the homes of believers, as Gehring explains, “served as meeting places for worship, prayer, instruction, community formation, and the celebration of the Lord’s Supper, all elements that, by definition, need to be present for qualification as a house church in the full sense.”¹²²

Suggested Gathering Parameters for Multi-Site Churches

In light of the data present above, no definitive evidence exists that would forbid or disqualify dividing a single church into multiple worship gatherings. The New Testament offers minimal clear instruction as to a prescriptive form of worship gathering,

¹²⁰Gehring elaborates, “Every local Christian assembly in which God is worshiped and Jesus Christ is proclaimed is a church for Paul This applies to the whole church at any location (see 1 Cor 11:22; 14:23; Rom 16:23). And it likewise applies to the house churches, such as those of Prisca and Aquila. Through the addition of *he ekklesia hola* in 1 Cor 14:23, an important distinction is made between the gathering *en ekklesia* in which the whole church gathered at one location and those in which only a part of the local church met in assembly. Paul does not indicate that there is any fundamental difference between these two. Both are gatherings *en ekklesia*.” Ibid., 27.

¹²¹See *ibid.*, 164-65.

¹²²*Ibid.*, 117. Gehring provides further explanation on why Jerusalem home gatherings should be understood as a viable expression of “church.” He states, “All four elements (teaching of the apostles, bread breaking, fellowship, and prayer) possess the character of a worship service. They were all an integral part of the worship assemblies held in individual houses in Jerusalem. Consequently, it is legitimate to call these house groups house *churches*” [emphasis original]. *Ibid.*, 85.

Towns’ conclusions again accede with Gehring’s: “Apparently the early Jerusalem church did not serve communion in a large gathering or celebration, but served the Lord’s table in small groups or cells that met in houses (Acts 2:46). Thus the large group in the Jerusalem church met for celebration, preaching, motivation and testimony (see Acts 3:11); and in small cells for fellowship, accountability, instruction and identity (see Acts 5:42). From these observations, I conclude that the norm for the New Testament church included both small cell groups and larger celebration groups.” Towns, *10 of Today’s Most Innovative Churches*, 243.

but it does support, at least descriptively, some variation of a small gatherings (cell) and large gathering (celebration) model. The church in Jerusalem, Rome, Corinth, and likely other locations provides validation for this multiple gathering arrangement.¹²³ If both house church gathering and local church gathering took place concurrently within the early church without harm, it stands to reason that the multi-site practice of segmenting a congregation into smaller groups for corporate worship is an acceptable and viable expression of church worship.¹²⁴

These findings provide the basis for the two multi-site “gathering” parameters to follow. First, when a multi-site church divides its congregation into multiple gatherings, it is understood that new churches *are not* created. Thus, a singular multi-site church remains one church, but is expressed through multiple church gatherings. *As such, multi-site churches should attempt to gather the entire church body periodically as the context allows.* Some may argue that regular (e.g., monthly or quarterly) gathering of all venues or sites is requisite.¹²⁵ If the Scriptures spoke clearly to this matter, it would

¹²³Consider Gehring’s summary statement: “As in the Jerusalem church, we again observed a plurality of house churches within the local church as a whole in Corinth. With all probability a multiple number of house churches existed in Rome as well. In light of the size of the city and because of the large number of groups, it is highly unlikely that the Christians there regularly met together in one place. There are also good indications of a plurality of house churches and Thessalonica, Ephesus, Philippi, and Laodicea.” Gehring, *House Church and Mission*, 225. For an extended discussion on this subject, see Gehring’s analysis of “A Plurality of House Churches within the Whole Church at One Location.” *Ibid.*, 155-59.

¹²⁴Though not explicitly a multi-site church formulation, this type of arrangement is labeled by Halter and Smay as a “hybrid” model of a megachurch and microchurches. They explain their “hybrid” church, Adullam (refuge), Denver, CO, as follows: “We have a missionary thrust that forces us out of the church walls into a network of incarnational communities, but we also deeply value our collective calling, our corporate essence, and our consistent larger gatherings. Our website now articulates that Adullam is a ‘congregational network of incarnational communities.’ In other words, we are holding together two aspects of church that people seem to think can’t go together.” Halter and Smay, *AND: The Gathered and Scattered Church*, 25.

¹²⁵See multi-site gathering recommendations from White and Yeats. White and Yeats, *Franchising McChurch*, 162-63.

be easy to mandate corporate or system-wide gatherings. Given the flexibility and lack of clear specifics on worship gathering forms and procedures, however, it is difficult to do more than recommend such plenary gatherings of all sites regardless of perceived benefit.

Second, if the dynamic of small *ekklesia* alongside larger *ekklesia* fostered strong spiritual growth of believers and exponential expansion of converts in the early church, then a similar pattern should be endorsed for multi-site churches. Therefore, multi-site churches should seek simultaneously to increase the number of their worship gatherings (venues or sites) and decrease the size of their worship gatherings. This approach to multi-site expansion not only emulates closely the expansion methodology of NT era churches, but it also provides a workable strategy for obedience to the Great Commission (Matt 28:18-20).

Preaching: How Do We Proclaim the Word?

Critics of the multi-site church methods raise various concerns about the dangers of preaching and proclamation within a multi-site church arrangement. Two issues in particular cause the greatest concern among those who reject the multi-site.

The first criticism is that multi-site churches, because of their elevation of a single teaching leader or pastor over the various venues or sites of a church, become (or have the potential to become) cults of personality. The second criticism is that preaching transference, whether by way of video telecast or video recording, degrades the value of the incarnational preaching process because it removes the preacher from the audience.¹²⁶

¹²⁶Technological innovation is not new, nor are its implications something with which the church is unfamiliar. At the same time, the acceleration of technological development will force

Within this section, these two criticisms will be evaluated individually. In light of this evaluation, parameters of multi-site proclamation will then be offered.¹²⁷

Multi-Site Churches and The Personality Cult Dilemma

Some argue that multi-site churches can create a cult of personality when a single person functions as the primary preaching voice for the congregation. While this problem can occur within non-video multi-site arrangements, it supposedly becomes distinctly acute with video-based preaching. It is for this reason that Eddie Gibbs critiques video scenario: “By using a video sermon, churches risk turning their teaching pastor into a celebrity. And that . . . can be a form of idolatry.”¹²⁸

Approaching the subject from a different angle, Towns, Stetzer, and Bird offer

Christianity to confront the embrace of new innovations at a rapidly quickened pace. Video preaching within multi-site arrangements is more novel today, but, to borrow a colloquial phrase, it is merely “the tip of the iceberg.” Ecclesiologists, whether practitioners or theorists, will soon be faced with a host of new theological challenges (with manifold implications) as concepts like Internet churches, holographic preaching, and social networking, among other advances, permeate into the church over the coming decades. For further perspective, see Surratt, Ligon, and Bird, *The Multi-Site Church Revolution*, 164.

¹²⁷As noted earlier, some criticize multi-site churches for their accommodation to a consumer culture. See White and Yeats, *Franchising McChurch*, 31; and Towns, Stetzer, and Bird, *11 Innovations in the Local Church*, 93-94. Thomas White articulates this position more directly and with a degree of hostility: “With varying degrees of guilt, the multi-site method encourages consumerism I fear that catering to worship styles and atmosphere preferences create purveyors of religious products serving spiritual consumers without creating substantive life change. This can lead to Internet churches like LifeChurch.Tv with a virtual campus in SecondLife.com. Parishioners never leave their homes. They simply turn on computers to watch a different screen, experiencing virtual community through discussion boards, contributing offerings through PayPal, and taking communion with saltine crackers and cool-aid.” White, “Nine Reasons I Don’t Like Multi-site Churches,” 42.

In reality, the “consumerism” critique is not unique to multi-site churches. It is a blanket concern generally voiced about churches that appear to over-employ social innovations, advancements, and business concepts in their pursuit of growth and expansion. As such, this issue will not be addressed because it is not specific to the multi-site church arrangement. Consider Os Guinness’ “Introduction” to *Dining with the Devil* in which he discusses innovations and analyzes the strengths and weaknesses of the Church-Growth Movement. Os Guinness, *Dining with the Devil: The Megachurch Movement Flirts with Modernity* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1993), 24, 11-34. See also, Surratt, Ligon, and Bird, *A Multi-site Road Trip*, 204-05.

¹²⁸Bob Smietana, “High-Tech Circuit Riders: Satellite Churches are Discovering a New Way to Grow the Body of Christ,” *Christianity Today*, 31 August 2005, 60.

a related concern: “Multi-site churches require a speaking ability that most simply do not have, and thus the pool of leadership is reduced. That leads to a great challenge when the compelling communicator projected all over the country falls, dies, or leaves.”¹²⁹

Gibbs and Towns, Stetzer, and Bird raise valid points, and other prominent multi-site voices like Dave Browning and Greg Ligon share similar apprehensions.¹³⁰

The notion of projecting one individual via live or recorded video to all of a church’s worship gatherings at minimum creates the potential for serious leadership and ministry hazards.¹³¹

According to Dave Travis, however, a single teacher approach is more the exception than the norm. Travis explains, “In most multi-site churches, there is buy in for teaching teams.”¹³² Even in situations where a system-wide teaching team may not be present, some churches like Mars Hill Church, Seattle, Washington, include additional preaching voices by having campus pastors preaching 20 percent of the time for lead-

¹²⁹Towns, Stetzer, and Bird, *11 Innovations in the Local Church*, 93; see also Harrison, Cheyney, and Overstreet, *Spin-Off Churches*, 80.

¹³⁰Greg Ligon, telephone interview by the author, 21 September 2010; Dave Browning, telephone interview by the author, 16 September 2010.

¹³¹At the same time, this challenge is not unique to multi-site churches. Greear argues from personal experience: “Leaders-worship is certainly a danger in large churches, and unfortunately many large church leaders seem all too willing to foster it. However, the cult of personality can exist as much in a small, single-campus church—in fact more so! When I pastored a small church, my congregation seemed to think that my presence was necessary for everything of spiritual significance. I had to marry and bury everyone, and my people wanted me to resolve every problem and answer every question. I tried to teach them otherwise, but their natural tendency was to be much more dependent on me than they are now that we are a multi-site church! Summit Church members are now exposed, weekly, to many other Spirit-filled pastors in our church to whom they can look for leadership and ministry. Greear, “A Pastor Defends His Multi-Site Church,” 25. See Martyn Lloyd-Jones’ comment from nearly 40 years earlier: “In the past, let us admit, there may have been too much of a tendency for the pulpit to be almost independent of the pew; and for the people in the pew to revere the preacher sometimes almost to the point of idolatry.” D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *Preaching & Preachers* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1971), 121.

¹³²Dave Travis, telephone interview by the author, 16 September 2010.

preacher absence or vacancy should it occur. Driscoll and Breshears detail the Mars Hill approach:

Each campus of one hundred people or more must have a full-time paid campus pastor to lead the mission. That campus pastor opens and closes services and is available after the service along with the campus elders to pray for and counsel people. The campus pastor also covers the pulpit ten to twelve weeks a year when the main preaching pastor is out of the pulpit. The campus pastor is the first-among-equals lead pastor at the campus and has the full authority to lead the mission as a uniquely gifted leader of leaders. In this way, every campus has a visible leader who can speak to its needs and issues. He has a long-term commitment to the people there and the ability to assume the pulpit every week if needed, should the primary preaching pastor no longer be able to preach due to something such as severe illness or death. He oversees the elder team at his campus and does all of the biblical pastoral functions, with the assistance of the campus deacons.¹³³

In his personal investigation of the multi-site concept, Matt Chandler realized that some multi-site churches, which are often criticized for hampering leadership development, are actually using the multi-site mechanism to develop more leaders.¹³⁴ New Hope Christian Fellowship in Hawaii provides a tangible example of what Chandler discovered. Warren Bird explains,

Wayne Cordeiro, founding pastor of New Hope Christian Fellowship Oahu, Honolulu, HI (www.enewhope.org), believes churches should become cultures to develop emerging leaders. New Hope's satellite campuses are training venues for young and upcoming leaders. Today more than 10,000 people worship each weekend in 21 services across the church's 7 locations (they span a 40-mile spread across the island of Oahu). Wayne is very intentional about maintaining a mentoring relationship with the campus pastor at each site so as to develop them as leaders. "Lots of people do satellites to grow their church bigger," he says. "Our motivation is to have a bigger venue to train young leaders." The teaching, featuring the Honolulu teaching team, is 90 percent video the first year of each new campus, 70 percent the second year, and 50 percent the third year. That saves the campus pastor a huge amount of time in not having to prepare weekly messages. "In effect, we give our first-year pastors 60 days a year to do local team building," he explains. He ensures that they're mentored in other areas as well, such as by

¹³³Driscoll and Breshears, *Vintage Church*, 253-54.

¹³⁴Chandler, "Clouds on the Horizon," 40.

initially handling the finances through the central office as the young pastors look on and learn.¹³⁵

Undoubtedly, the possibility of creating cults of personality within a multi-site church framework does exist. At the same time, this danger is not limited to multi-site churches.¹³⁶ Preacher veneration can take place in any kind of church whether small or large or with many sites or one. To date, no evidence (beyond conjecture) can validate or verify the claim that multi-site churches produce personality cults. Until such evidence does surface, this criticism is moot at best.

Multi-Site Churches and the Incarnational Preaching Dilemma

Several multi-site opponents and proponents alike contend that videocast multi-site sermon delivery methods (both live and recorded proclamation) are problematic or inappropriate because of what happens when the preacher is physically absent or removed from the congregation.¹³⁷ Dave Browning, pastor of Christ the King Church and a notable multi-site leader, aptly introduces part of the concern:

¹³⁵Bird, "One Church in Many Locations," 11.

¹³⁶See Thumma and Travis' chapter long discussion entitled, "Megachurches Are Cults of Personality." Scott Thumma and Dave Travis, *Beyond Megachurch Myths: What We Can Learn from America's Largest Churches* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2007), 55-78.

¹³⁷For example both Thomas White (a multi-site critic) and Kevin Ezell (a multi-site practitioner at the time of interview) express concerns about video-driven proclamation. Thomas White, telephone interview by the author, 16 September 2010; Kevin Ezell, telephone interview by the author, 12 September 2010.

Eddie Gibbs comments on this procedure even more strongly. According to Gibbs, "[In video proclamation] we have replaced the person [with] an image; the preacher becomes distanced from the congregation As we see this in Paul and his ministry, there is credibility in the message because the life of the preacher is an open book. You lose that with video and holographic preaching." Eddie Gibbs, telephone interview by the author, 12 September 2010.

I think there is a danger for the guy on the screen that he becomes detached from the body. There is also a danger to the people. It may be that people come and have a more passive relationship to everything. They can have a passive relationship to a person too, but when [the preacher] is a screen it becomes more like going to the movies. I am a big believer that a crowd is not a church. I am concerned with the connectivity of people to that concept.¹³⁸

Echoing a similar sentiment about preacher and congregation video separation, John Hammett explains, “I think the whole idea of a pastor’s life not supporting the preaching is a problem. I think there is something there to having someone teaching face-to-face, ‘incarnationally.’”¹³⁹

Common to each of these critiques is the belief that video preaching arrangements somehow violate (or too severely detract from) the incarnational model of ministry that Christ demonstrated and that Paul and others emulated. In a *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society*, Douglas Groothuis considers Jesus’, Paul’s, and John’s, incarnational approaches to communication. While Groothuis does not have multi-site churches in view in his writing, he provides a helpful insight into this incarnational preaching question. He states,

Christ’s incarnation is God’s manner of redeeming erring mortals, but it also spells out a pattern of relationships and communication for Christian discipleship. Christian life and ministry should be incarnational in that the body of Christ should relish and body fellowship and personal involvement with other believers and the nonbelieving world as well. In this way the reality of Christ can, in a sense, be “made flesh” through our physical presence. In Jesus’ high-priestly prayer to the Father he expounds this dynamic: “As you sent me into the world, I have sent them into the world” (John 18:18). Just as Christ “made the Father known” (1:18) by his

See Gibbs’ comments in his interview with Bob Smietana of Christianity Today: “[The virtual preacher] removes the preacher from the community, and I’ve got some problem with that. Ministry requires an ongoing dialogue with the community.” Smietana, “High-Tech Circuit Riders,” 60.

¹³⁸Dave Browning, telephone interview by the author, 16 September 2010.

¹³⁹John Hammett, telephone interview by the author, 17 September 2010. It would be helpful to consider Jonathan Leeman’s critique of video preaching. Leeman argues that video preaching creates a “thin conception of relationship and community, but seems to bear the advantages of a thick one.” Jonathan Leeman, telephone interview by the author, 22 September 2010.

life among the living, so we should make God known by our personal presence in God's world for the sake of his creatures.

An incarnational model of communication considers personal, face-to-face engagement to be incommensurate with other communicative modalities *but does not reject other modalities entirely* [emphasis added]. Paul's letters are foundational to biblical theology, but he nevertheless confesses his desire for personal contact with his Christian friends: "I pray that now at last by God's will the way may be opened for me to come to you. I long to see you so that I may impart to you some spiritual gift to make you strong—that is, that you and I may be mutually encouraged by each other's faith" (Rom 1:10-11). Paul's letter to the Romans has been an unparalleled spiritual gift to the world for two thousand years, but Paul still yearned to have an incarnational presence in the life of the Roman believers. Put another way, embodied fellowship is an irreducible and incommensurate quality that cannot be adequately translated into any other form of communication.

This irreducible quality of fellowship is also evident in John's comment: "I have much to write to you, but I do not want to use paper in nature. Instead, I hope to visit you and talk with you face to face, so that our joy may be complete" (2 John 12; see also 3 John 13-14). For John the fullness of joy was reserved for incarnational encounters despite the fact that he was an instrument of the Holy Spirit in the writing of Scripture.¹⁴⁰

With Jesus, Paul, and John, as Groothuis carefully asserts, there was a desire on their part to communicate in person (incarnationally) with those to whom they ministered.¹⁴¹ At the same time, there were situations in which they did not possess the opportunity to communicate with their receiver(s) in an incarnational fashion.¹⁴² Thus, other means of communication were necessary to deliver the message(s) of the communicator to the receiver. Greidanus verifies this fact in his discussion on Paul's "long distance preaching" through his letters:

¹⁴⁰Douglas Groothuis, "Christian Scholarship and the Philosophical Analysis of Cyberspace Technologies," *JETS* 41.4 (1998): 638.

¹⁴¹Consider Bruce's comment: "[Paul's letters] are usually second-best substitutes for his presence and spoken word. In Galatia, for example, he expresses the wish that he could be with his readers so that they could gather the intensity of emotions from the tone of his voice as they could not get from his writing." F. F. Bruce, "Paul in Acts and Letters," in *Dictionary of Paul and His Letters*, ed. Gerald F. Hawthorne, Ralph P. Martin, and Daniel G. Reid (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1993), 738.

¹⁴²Note that the nature of Paul's letters, which were both "occasional" (written for specific congregations) and "general" (carrying the apostle's authority for all who might read them)." John B. Polhill, *Paul & His Letters* (Nashville: B&H, 1999), 121.

Paul's letters may also be characterized as long-distance preaching. They were like preaching not only because they addressed the specific needs in early churches but also because they were primarily oral communications. Except for brief conclusions (2 Thess 3:17; Gal 6:11; 1 Cor 16:21; Col 4:18), Paul did not write these letters but dictated them to secretaries (amanuenses; cf. Rom 16:22) for the purpose of public reading in the churches. Like preaching, therefore, these letters were a form of oral communication. Moreover, in the Greek letter writing tradition, a letter was a stand-in for the presence (parousia) of its author. Since Paul was "unable to be present in person, his letters were a direct substitute, and were to be accorded weight equal to Paul's physical presence" (Doty, 36: cf. 1 Cor 5:3-4; 2 Cor 10:11). Listening to Paul's letters being read, therefore, was the same as hearing Paul himself speak—except that the speaking was long-distance and was committed to writing.¹⁴³

Clearly, face-to-face contact in life, ministry, and preaching would have been (and remains) optimal, but it was not requisite for healthy and "biblical" communication of a message between a leader and his followers. As Groothuis concludes his article, he touches on the "ideal of communication" as it relates to technological innovation. His words are instructive:

The incarnational ideal for communication does not eliminate cyberspace or other media of communication. Technological innovation is involved in God's command for his image-bearers to "have dominion over the earth" (Gen 1:26-28). With respect to evangelism, the apostle Paul said that he had become all things to all people so that he might win as many as possible to Christ (1 Cor 9:22). Analogously we should use whatever media are appropriate in particular contexts. Nevertheless, unless we subject all means of communication to metaphysical and epistemological analysis (inquiring as to their nature, strengths and weaknesses) in accordance with the dicta of our Christian perspective we may mismatch the message with the medium and fail to glorify God in our stewardship of the resources at our disposal (10:31).¹⁴⁴

Obviously, Groothuis does not provide a blanket affirmation of video preaching in multi-site churches, as this subject is not in his view. At the same time, he

¹⁴³Sydney Greidanus, "Preaching from Paul Today" in *Dictionary of Paul and His Letters*, ed. Gerald F. Hawthorne, Ralph P. Martin, and Daniel G. Reid (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1993), 738.

¹⁴⁴Groothuis, "Christian Scholarship," 639-40.

does provide a fitting framework for evaluating the video-preaching concept by challenging his readers to juxtapose the use of technological with biblical precedents in order to arrive at scripturally faithful conclusions.¹⁴⁵

Based on this framework, it is difficult to argue that the “ideal of communication” of preaching ministry is anything other than the “in person” preaching of a pastor to a congregation that he knows and interacts with regularly and personally. While this type of preaching arrangement may be idyllic, it presents challenges even to existing traditional (single-site) churches. For example, in churches that grow large (e.g., 300 members or more), is it possible for the pastor “to know” his entire flock personally via regular interaction?¹⁴⁶ In smaller churches led by bivocational pastors, is it always possible for these preachers to give the time necessary “to know” and minister to the needs of their congregation?

In seeking to develop ecclesiological parameters and boundaries, theologians and practitioners alike run the risk of under or over-accentuating elements of church forms and patterns to the detriment of church health and growth.¹⁴⁷ The subject of incarnational preaching provides an example of this conundrum. Some may argue strongly that incarnational preaching is the most desirable form of proclamation, and as such, it is the only form of scripturally appropriate preaching. Conversely, others may

¹⁴⁵Ibid.

¹⁴⁶See Surratt, Ligon, and Bird, *A Multi-site Church Roadtrip*, 203-04.

¹⁴⁷For example, some churches overemphasize the role of the Sunday morning sermon in the growth and development of church members. See Marshall and Payne who argue as follows: “to say that sermons (in the sense of Bible expositions in our Sunday gatherings) are necessary but not sufficient is to simply stand on the theological truth that it is the word of the gospel that is sufficient, rather than any one particular form of its delivery. We might say that speaking of the word of the Gospel under the power of the Spirit is entirely sufficient—it’s just that on its own, the 25-minute sermonic form of it is not.” Colin

share the belief the incarnational preaching is the “ideal,” but reject it as the only exclusive form of biblically faithful proclamation. Essentially, both lobby for their positions based on hermeneutical constructs that demonstrate some degree of subjectivity. Thus, the probability of consensus on this topic (and others like it) is remote.

While a definitive resolution to these different perspectives is elusive, the case made for allowing non-incarnational preaching forms is stronger than the case made against it. This conclusion is based on the following rationale.

First, NT patterns of preaching and proclamation are not clear enough to rule out non-incarnational sermon delivery. Michael Green’s remarks are insightful regarding the diversity of preaching practices of the era: “It would be a mistake to assume . . . that there was a . . . uniformity about the proclamation of Christian truth in antiquity. That there was a basic homogeneity in what was preached we may agree, but there was wide variety in the way it was presented.”¹⁴⁸

Second, the focus of Jesus’ and the apostles’ clearly centered on the primacy of disseminating the gospel.¹⁴⁹ If the “the basic missionary strategy was to win as many people as possible for Christ before his expected return and to do this ‘in the whole world’ (Col 1.6),” as Eckhard Schnabel posits, then it is reasonable that Jesus, Paul, Peter, John and others would have employed a variety of mechanisms and innovations

Marshall and Tony Payne, *The Trellis and the Vine: The Ministry Mind-Shift that Changes Everything* (Kingsford, NSW, Australia: Matthias Media, 2009), 102-03.

¹⁴⁸Michael Green, *Evangelism in the Early Church* (Guildford, Surrey: Eagle, 1970), 137; and also see *Ibid.*, 150, 234.

¹⁴⁹In Green’s words, “Jesus came to seek and to save the lost. That was the supreme purpose of his incarnation and atonement.” Green, *Evangelism in the Early Church*, 301.

(any and all means) to sow the gospel as widely as possible.¹⁵⁰ Greear expounds upon this idea:

The Apostles used the technology available to them to preach in absentia We know that many of Paul's letters were intended to be circulated for reading throughout the churches. If Paul could have cut a DVD from the Philippian jail and passed that around, I can't see why he wouldn't have done so. I know that some might respond, "Well, yeah, but Paul's letters were the inspired Bible. He was an Apostle. That's why his letters could be passed around." We know, however, that there were several of Paul's letters passed around that were not "inspired," such as the middle Corinthian letter.

If the technology was available, don't you think Peter might have burned a DVD of himself and sent that around? If they could have simulcast John's recounting of his last meeting with Christ, don't you think they would have done it? Is there anything that says that we must be able to see the actual flesh and blood of the preacher? Those who say that video removes the "flesh and blood, incarnational" nature of gospel preaching would also have to question the use of voice amplification. If it is argued that video removes the incarnational nature of preaching, a similar argument could be made that God did not intend churches to ever be bigger than what would allow an unamplified voice to be heard by all, because in so doing it would remove the "touchability" of the pastor. Obviously, such questions go beyond a responsible interpretation of Scripture.¹⁵¹

¹⁵⁰Eckhard J. Schnabel, "Mission, Early Non-Pauline," in *Dictionary of the Later New Testament & Its Developments*, ed. Ralph P. Martin and Peter H. Davis (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1997), 754. Consider "The Feasibility of the Missionary Commission." *Ibid.*, 755. See Green's explanation: "We are not surprised, therefore, to find that concern for the state of the unevangelized was one of the greatest driving forces behind Christian preaching of the gospel in the early church." Green, *Evangelism in the Early Church*, 302. See also, Green's "Hope of the End" discussion. *Ibid.*, 322.

Scot McKnight explains cogently what happens when the Church loses its focus on the mission of evangelization. McKnight states, "Goals once achieved, usually recede in importance and give way to other concerns. In early Christianity, in many areas, this seems to have been the case with missionary efforts to convert pagans. Settled communities, achieved often with considerable effort, soon found other issues dominating their concern. Doctrinal controversies and practical issues may well have sapped many early Christian communities of their interest in evangelizing harder to reach people groups." Scot McKnight, "Gentiles, Gentile Mission," in *Dictionary of the Later New Testament & Its Developments*, ed. Ralph P. Martin and Peter H. Davis (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1997), 394. Is it possible (or probable) that the rejection of innovations like video-based preaching displays a prioritization of "doctrinal controversies and practical issues" over and above the mandate for evangelism (Matt 28:18-20)?

¹⁵¹Greear, "A Pastor Defends His Multi-Site Church," 22. Greear does qualify his claim; he continues, "This is not to say that all technology is allowable or helpful, because sometimes the medium affects the way people perceive the message. No doubt, deciding what to do with technology that was unavailable in biblical times is a difficult subject, and we must be both open-minded and cautious in appropriating it for our purposes." *Ibid.*

See similar deductions from Driscoll and Breshears: "In the days of the New Testament, the apostles used technology available to them to speak to churches at which they were not present. They sent

Third, there is no definitive evidence to demonstrate that the individual who delivers the corporate proclamation during a worship gathering must be the lone shepherd of that congregation.¹⁵² Dever's findings validate this understanding. After summarizing the roles of elders detailed in the New Testament, Dever writes:

None of these examples presents an explicit command, but they describe *the common practice of setting aside at least one individual from among the elders potentially from outside the congregation's community, supporting that individual, and giving him the primary teaching responsibility* [emphasis added]. Nevertheless, the preacher, or pastor, is fundamentally one of the elders of his congregation. Working together with that senior pastor, the plurality of elders aids both him and the church by rounding out the pastor's gifts, making up for his shortcomings, supplementing his judgment, and creating support in the congregation for decisions, leaving leaders less exposed to unjust criticism.¹⁵³

In reality, models of pastoral care and ministry that place the sole burden of pastoral care on the preacher are in jeopardy of nullifying the priorities of deacon leadership, laity responsibly, and mutual care and discipleship required of each member within a congregation.¹⁵⁴ Accordingly, employing a campus pastor to organize and

letters by courier to the churches they were responsible for. Some of those letters have universal authority and were immediately canonized and became the New Testament epistles.

One example of pastoral leadership being exercised remotely is found in 1 Corinthians 5:3. The church had affirmed an alternative sexual lifestyle, so Paul wrote them a letter to be read aloud to the church: 'For though absent in body, I am present in spirit; and as if present, I have already pronounced judgment on the one who did such a thing.' Perhaps if the apostles had video they would have used it; at the very least their example permits what Scripture does not condemn.

Effective churches have always bucked their critics and have quickly adopted new technology, ranging from the early movie theaters to radio to TV to satellite broadcasting. Today we are in an age where people are used to getting video messages on screens ranging from mobile devices to TVs to theaters. It is foolish stewardship not to at least consider using some of those screens for the preaching of the gospel." Driscoll and Breshears, *Vintage Church*, 247-48.

¹⁵²See Marshall and Payne, *The Trellis and the Vine*, 114-18.

¹⁵³Mark Dever, "The Doctrine of Church," in *A Theology for the Church*, ed. Danny Akin (Nashville: B&H, 2007), 805. Is it plausible that Dever's conclusions provide room (and perhaps support) for a multi-site senior pastor/campus pastor configuration? It appears so. See Mark Dever's explanation of the "Pastor/Elder/Bishop" function for a fuller discussion on the topic (with examples cited). *Ibid.*, 800-05.

¹⁵⁴Bill Hull, *The Disciple-Making Church: Applying the Dynamics of the First-Century Church to Your Church Today* (Tarrytown, NY: Fleming H. Revell, 1990), 47; Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 958.

facilitate the care, nurture, and guidance of a congregation is not only allowable, but in some respects more favorable than the preacher and pastor role being confined to one individual.

One could make the case that the individual who “pastors” the congregation is the person most suited to do congregational preaching, specifically because of his knowledge and understanding of the people’s “needs.” While this arrangement is perhaps most ideal, it may not most adequately address the needs of the congregation. For example, if the leader is skilled at pastoral care but is weak in sermon preparation or delivery, he may not be the best person to speak to the needs of the congregation, even though he is invested in the care of his people. Further, a gifted communicator may know the needs of the congregation and he may speak to those needs well, but he may operate poorly in the area of pastoral care. In either case, the one who pastors may not be the best preacher and vice versa.

Suggested Preaching Parameters for Multi-Site Churches

Based on the preceding discussion, it is prudent and necessary here to provide three guiding proclamation parameters to foster the health and well being of multi-site churches and their pastors. These three parameters will focus on (1) the development of a teaching team, (2) the requirement of a campus pastor, and (3) the impetus for videocast preaching.

Parameter 1: Development of a teaching team approach. While there is always a danger that personality cults can form around a pastor in a church of any size, the potential of the “pastor worship” problems may become particularly acute in multi-

site churches where a single leader is elevated over multiple church locations. For the benefit of both the pastor and the multi-site church congregation, it is strongly advisable that multi-site churches utilize a teaching team approach to corporate worship gatherings, rather than functioning with a single teaching voice (or face) for the entire organization.¹⁵⁵

Employment of this teaching team parameter offers at least four benefits. First, it distributes the preaching load to multiple individuals, thereby allowing the teaching team members the opportunity to invest more time in strengthening the quality of their sermons and to invest time in other leadership responsibilities. Second, if the selection of an additional teaching team member (or members) is handled appropriately, the senior pastor has the opportunity to guide the church in selecting a team member who can become a suitable successor at the time of the senior pastor's departure. Third, in cases where the senior pastor is no longer able to lead the multi-site church (e.g., sickness, moral failing, death, termination, or departure), the teaching team structure may facilitate a less turbulent transition during the period when no senior leader of the multi-site church is present. Fourth, the teaching team parameter provides an arrangement whereby a teaching pastor can be cultivated and prepared to launch a new church congregation from a healthy and supportive church structure.

Parameter 2: Requirement of a campus pastor. Based on the discussion above, concerns raised about a single individual preaching and pastoring a multi-site congregation are clear and valid. Even if a multi-site church were to develop a teaching

¹⁵⁵See Thumma and Travis' discussion on "The Emergence of Leadership Teams." Thumma and Travis, *Beyond Megachurch Myths*, 71-72.

team with multiple members, unless teaching team members were numerous enough to provide one teacher at each site, the incarnational preaching challenge is unavoidable.

While there is not an “ideal” remedy to the incarnational concern, there is a partial one: the campus pastor model. This model provides a mechanism through which a congregation operates with an on-site “campus” pastor (or elder) who leads (pastors) the congregation gathered at a single site of the multi-site church.

Several benefits are evident within this approach. First, the campus pastor model facilitates the growth and development of unseasoned pastors. If mentored and trained well, campus pastors can be given greater levels of pastoral responsibility, including corporate worship proclamation on-site and multi-site-wide. Second, the campus pastor model can provide an excellent context for preparing emerging leaders to plant new churches. Third, and perhaps most importantly to this discussion, campus pastors can do shepherding and pastoral care more efficiently and effectively because their congregational gathering is smaller, and they have more time to tend to the flock because they are investing minimal time on weekly sermon preparation.

Parameter 3: Impetus for videocast preaching. The primary question for appraising video preaching is simple: “Is it acceptable and/or beneficial to use video-based messages (live or recorded) in place of physically-present preachers for worship services?” In short, the answer is “yes,” it is acceptable and beneficial but with one critical caveat. In surveying NT precedents, it is probable that the apostles would have utilized video reproduction (or any other innovation) for the proclamation of the gospel had it been available to them. Their objective, after all, was worldwide evangelization, and they exercised a variety of means and methods to bring non-believers into

relationship with God. At the same time, the priority of connectivity and relationship maintained by the apostles and NT authors suggests that if video technology (or any innovation) inhibited gospel proclamation, acceptance, and application among non-believers or growing Christians, the early church either would have jettisoned that technology or refined its use.

Emulating this paradigm of evaluation, videocast sermons (whether concurrent or recorded) should be allowed and employed by multi-site and single churches alike if the stated and applied intent (motivation) is to facilitate greater or expanded proclamation of the gospel. Herein lies that critical caveat. If video technologies are used merely to add congregational numbers or to provide more choices to appease the church membership base, then video-based preaching is an inappropriate substitute for incarnational preaching. The ideal outcome, of course, is to see every church with a proclamation arrangement that is as incarnational as possible. Therefore, in cases where a church is consistently using videocast sermons to reach new populations and through the employment of a campus pastor are seeking to demonstrate incarnational leadership through that individual (allowing him regular preaching opportunities), videocast sermons are acceptable and beneficial.

While video-driven preaching should be limited in its application, it does afford at least two benefits. First, it is an excellent way of maximizing fiscal stewardship. By broadcasting or rebroadcasting one individual to multiple sites or venues, a church saves time for the pastoral team members who would otherwise be creating individual sermons for each of the multi-site church locations. Second, video preaching allows a multi-site church to expand its reach of ministry beyond the physical limitations of an

individual speaker and the seating capacity of finite worship space.

Pastoring: How Do We Shepherd the People?

Another theological (and practical) tension point within the multi-site church arrangement is the activity of pastoring or shepherding.¹⁵⁶ Some contend that because the role of preacher and pastor is separated into two distinct functions within some multi-site church arrangements, appropriate shepherding and discipling does not (or cannot) take place within multi-site churches.¹⁵⁷ Some also fear that multi-site churches discourage active participation and church membership because they place low expectations on

¹⁵⁶During this discussion, the terms “pastoring” and “shepherding” will be used nearly synonymously with shepherding being understood as everything included in developing believers into more faithful followers of Christ. Consider both Allison, “Theological Defense of Multi-site,” 12; and Smith’s assessment of pastoring in a missions context: “Pastoring here is recognized as the work of ‘guiding, comforting, correcting, encouraging, nurturing, protecting, healing [laying of hands], and [modeling worship for]’ a congregation and its members.” Ebbie C. Smith, “Pastoral Responsibilities,” in *Evangelical Dictionary of World Missions*, ed. A Scott Moreau (Grand Rapids: Baker, 200), 729.

¹⁵⁷Allison, “Theological Defense of Multi-site,” 12. Halter and Smay clarify how these roles are generally divided within a multi-site arrangement. They state, “There are many unique expressions with this model, but most multisite churches develop functional onsite pastoral teams or ‘campus pastors’ that care for, assimilate, disciple, and organize people into small groups, while keeping the training, leadership development, administration, and teaching more centralized.” Halter and Smay, *AND: The Gathered and Scattered Church*, 20-21.

The term *discipling* above has been chosen carefully to stress the purpose undergirding pastoring functions, that is, facilitating the personal and corporate growth of a congregation in obeying Christ. Note also Darrin Patrick’s equating of shepherding with pastoral care in his chapter, “A Shepherding Man.” Darrin Patrick, *Church Planter: The Man, The Message, The Mission* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2010), 79-92.

Bill Hull concisely defines discipling as: “the intentional training of disciples, with accountability, on the basis of loving relationships.” Hull, *The Disciple Making Church*, 32. As Hull elaborates further, note his placement of pastoral care within discipling: “*Discipling means managing a system in which teaching, training, evangelism, and pastoral care take place* [emphasis original]. It involves the multidimensional work of the leadership team as they coach the congregation and a variety of ways and means Anything that helps a person move forward in Him fits the label *discipling* [emphasis original]. Ibid., 36; Lawless’ definition is also beneficial: “Disciplemaking is the overall process of guiding believers to be followers of Jesus.” Chuck Lawless, *Discipled Warriors: Growing Healthy Churches that Are Equipped for Spiritual Warfare* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2002), 108.

For further analysis of disciplemaking as a process, see Elmer Towns, “Discipleship,” in *Practical Encyclopedia of Evangelism and Church Growth* (Ventura, CA: Regal, 1995), 138-87; David W. Shenk and Ervin R. Stutzman, *Creating Communities of the Kingdom: New Testament Models of Church Planting* (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 1988), 90-106, 148-61; and Robert E. Coleman, *The Master Plan of Evangelism*, 3rd ed. (Grand Rapids: Fleming H. Revell, 1993).

congregational involvement.¹⁵⁸ Within this section, the debate over multi-site discipleship will be examined. Once this examination is complete, parameters for multi-site pastoring will be offered.

Perceived Inadequacies of Multi-site Church Pastoring

In evaluating the multi-site church concept, church researcher and missiologist, Ed Stetzer, has voiced several concerns about pastoring that he perceives to be forfeited or downplayed within multi-site church arrangements. In the “Foreword” of *Multi-site Churches*, authored by Scott McConnell, Stetzer surmises,

Pastoral responsibilities can get lost in the mix of a multi-site church. The scriptural assignments of praying over the sick (see James 5:14); watching over those placed in your care (see 1 Pet. 5:1-3); and discipline (see 1 Cor 5) are duties assigned to a campus pastor, but we also know it often does not happen. The temptation to primarily focus on the worship service event can lead to a personal disconnection between shepherd and sheep.¹⁵⁹

A year earlier (2008), Stetzer blogged a nearly verbatim form of this statement, under the heading “Questions for McChurch.”¹⁶⁰ His post stirred the ire of Geoff

¹⁵⁸According to research from Leadership Network, this conclusion is inaccurate. From a survey of 416 multi-site churches in the United, Bird and Walters found “[Respondents] agreed that choosing to go multi-site has affected the development of their lay leaders. Nearly a third of the churches we surveyed (29%) called the impact [of the multi-site strategy on leadership development] significant, and another half (50%) said leadership development within their church had increased ‘somewhat.’ This adds up to an impressive amount: 79% said that since their church became multi-site, leadership development through lay mobilization has increased either somewhat or significantly.” Warren Bird and Kristin Walters, “Multisite is Multiplying: Survey Identifies Leading Practices and Confirms New Developments in the Movement’s Expansion.” Leadership Network (Dallas) 2 September 2010, 13 [on-line]; accessed 4 September 2010; available from http://leadnet.org/resources/download/multisite_is_multiplying_new_developments_in_the_movements_expansion/; Internet.

¹⁵⁹Ed Stetzer, “Foreword” in Scott McConnell, *Multi-Site Churches: Guidance for the Movement’s Next Generation* (Nashville: B&H, 2009), xii.

¹⁶⁰Ed Stetzer, “Questions for McChurch – Wednesday, June 4 2008” Ed Stetzer: The LifeWay Research Blog [on-line]; accessed 25 November 2010; available from <http://www.edstetzer.com/2008/06/questions-for-mchurch.html>; Internet. Stetzer penned an abbreviated form of this same statement in 2007. See Towns, Stetzer, and Bird, *11 Innovations in the Local Church*, 93.

Surratt, pastor of ministries at Seacoast Church, Mount Pleasant, South Carolina, and leading co-author of *The Multi-site Church Revolution* and *A Multi-site Church Roadtrip*,¹⁶¹ so Surratt responded to Stetzer with a letter of critique. Stetzer acknowledged Surratt's concerns by uploading the letter (with permission) within his next blog post, and an online, open conversation between the two individuals (and others) ensued.¹⁶²

Surratt addressed a variety of concerns within his writing, and the various individuals who contributed to the blog gave added weight to the discussion. One of the most important statements found in Surratt's initial correspondence targets Stetzer's quote cited above. Surratt writes,

I'm curious to know what your evidence is for this statement: how do we know that pastoral care is not happening in multi-site churches? I would argue that pastoral care is a higher value at our campuses than at a traditional church. Our campus pastors do not spend hours writing weekly homilies to be delivered for 30 minutes on a Sunday and instead focus all of their attention on seeing that the sick are prayed for, watching over the flock, and breaking bread with the beloved.¹⁶³

Surratt's response underscores the problem of unverified critique of multi-site churches. Many of the purported weaknesses of multi-site churches emerge not from quantifiable, concrete research, but from theoretical assumptions based on limited investigation and experience. Recognizing this point is critical for assessing and

¹⁶¹Surratt, Ligon, and Bird, *The Multi-Site Church Revolution*; and Surratt, Ligon, and Bird, *A Multi-site Church Roadtrip* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2006). Geoff Surratt has also independently authored the work Geoff Surratt, *Ten Stupid Things That Keep Churches from Growing: How Leaders Can Overcome Costly Mistakes* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2009).

¹⁶²Ed Stetzer, "Questions for 'Questions for McChurch' – Thursday, June 5 2008" Ed Stetzer: The LifeWay Research Blog [on-line]; accessed 25 November 2010; available from <http://www.edstetzer.com/\2008/06/questions-for-questions-for-mc.html>; Internet.

¹⁶³Ibid. Surratt's next comment is also noteworthy: "Later in the same paragraph you say, 'I hope it keeps you up at night, wrestling with ways to build community in a system that can so easily

evaluating all claims (positive or negative) about the multi-site church concept and churches that utilize multi-site models.

Those with more limited multi-site experience, however, can (and do) raise legitimate concerns about pastoral activities within the multi-site church framework. For example, Hammett challenges the separation of preacher/pastor responsibilities:

A New Testament elder does more than preach to his flock; he shepherds them. Even if he has fellow elders to help shepherd the flock, he faces the responsibility of giving an account to God for those under his leadership. But how can anyone account for a scattered flock of several thousand in a variety of locations?¹⁶⁴

Hammett's concern and other pastoral challenges center on how multi-site churches execute leadership and congregational accountability mechanisms mandated in Scripture. Hammett and Allison, among others, question the manner by which multi-site churches address church discipline, church membership, and the Lord's Supper.¹⁶⁵ None of these issues is an optional consideration for multi-site churches, and multi-site pastors generally recognize this fact. Their collective response to these apprehensions, however, may be surprising. Instead of viewing multi-site structures as a liability or danger to

discourage it.' I don't understand how opening multiple, smaller locations with more localized pastoral oversight discourages building community." Ibid.

¹⁶⁴Hammett, *Biblical Foundations for Baptist Churches*, 316. White shares this concern, but in a more pejorative and colorful fashion: "Hebrews 13:17 says that leaders will give account for their actions and those under their charge. I wonder if video ministers will give account for those multi-site members—people who have never prayed with their pastor at the steps of an altar, shaken his hand on the way out the door, or ever seen him in person. The sheep may know the sound of their shepherd's voice but does the shepherd know anything about these sheep? White, "Nine Reasons I Don't Like Multi-site Churches," 43.

¹⁶⁵Hammett asks, "How can the whole church do membership and discipline?" John Hammett, telephone interview by the author, 17 September 2010. Allison adds, "There is an issue with the celebration of the Lord's Supper [taking place] 'when you come together' as emphasized in 1 Cor 11:18." Gregg Allison, telephone interview by the author, 15 September 2010.

The crux of these concerns hinges on whether or not one takes verses like 1 Cor 11:18 as prescriptive requirements for *all* individuals in a church to gather together for worship activities. Based on the above discussion of church gathering and fellowshiping patterns (pp. 37-51), the evidence is not strong enough to preclude a single church conducting activities like worship, the Lord's Supper, church discipline, and baptism in smaller gatherings as would be found in house church arrangements, cell and celebration

congregational health, multi-site advocates esteem the multi-site structure *because* it serves as a strengthening agent for their church meeting in multiple locations.

Multi-site Structure as Strengtheners of Pastoral Care and Church Health

Two aspects of the multi-site church arrangement are particularly affirmed in how they strengthen multi-site churches. Both of these will be investigated shortly. The first of these is the utilization of the campus pastor role as the primary facilitator for pastoral care and discipleship at each church site. The second is the reliance upon church laity to carry out the ministry functions throughout multi-site church systems. In his work, *Church Planter*, Darin Patrick provides a fitting entry point to this discussion:

The reality [of shepherding] is that there are too many sheep to shepherd. The average pastor can shepherd about seventy-five people, which (not coincidentally) is roughly the average size of a church in North America. Therefore, unless you want a church of that size or less, you must learn how to set up systems that promote pastoral care in your local church

Many [North American] churches expect the pastor to be the *only* [emphasis original] source of pastoral care and counseling. This exception is not only highly unrealistic . . . , but it also has devastating effects on pastors and their families. It also threatens the longevity of a church's vitality because it stunts leadership development Pastors were never designed to be the only caregivers/counselors in the local church. True congregational change occurs not merely as a result of the gifts and services of the pastors but because of the gifts and the services of the entire church

All of this means that if we aspire to be effective shepherds over God's people, we will need to do more of that *personal, one-on-one shepherding* [emphasis original]. We will also need to set up shepherding systems such as small-group Bible studies, community groups, or missional communities. The sad truth is that many churches use such systems—Sunday school, community groups, and the like—merely as tools for Bible study rather than as a means for pastoral challenge and care (one component of which will certainly be Bible study). People have reduced community to learning about the Bible, singing songs, and exchanging shallow pleasantries. The church has settled for programs that provide cognitive information but lack holistic spiritual formation. My church, The Journey [St. Louis, Missouri], is a multi-site church, meaning that we are one church with many

models, or city church constructs. To the contrary, the NT affords flexibility in these areas and clearly displays allowances for multiple expressions of a single church body in multiple locations.

locations. . . . The Journey elders have realized that community groups are an essential ministry for any campus (what we call each location) that we launch. This means that if God brings us an opportunity to begin a new campus, we must have two things in place in order to call that endeavor a Journey campus.

- 1) We must have a qualified man to serve as campus pastor.
- 2) We must have at least one community group up and running *before* [emphasis original] launch.¹⁶⁶

As Patrick finishes his argument for pastor-directed, congregation-facilitated implementation of discipleship through small groups, he concludes,

Good shepherds equip church members to shepherd one another in the context of small groups. The early church was made of smaller, missional house churches that we must mimic in the twenty-first century. The church must get smaller as it gets larger.¹⁶⁷

The priority of the campus pastor in multi-site churches. Throughout this chapter, the plurality of elders model of church governance has been given attention.¹⁶⁸ Based on the research for this dissertation, it is clear that the majority of multi-site churches demonstrate some variation of a plurality of elders structure.¹⁶⁹ It is from this leadership configuration that multi-site churches build and support a ministry paradigm that utilizes both a primary preaching (teaching) elder or elders and ruling (campus

¹⁶⁶Patrick, *Church Planter*, 85-86.

¹⁶⁷*Ibid.*, 87.

¹⁶⁸For explanative purposes, the titles for the pastoral office are recognized commensurately: “In the New Testament, the words *elder*, *shepherd* or *pastor*, and *bishop* or *overseer* are used interchangeably in the context of the local church office.” Dever, “The Doctrine of the Church,” 801.

¹⁶⁹While debate over the correct (biblical) form of church government is far from over, this concern appears settled for multi-site practitioners. For a definition of the various governmental forms and arguments to support them, see Chad O. Brand and R. Stanton Norman, *Perspectives on Church Government: Five Views of Church Polity* (Nashville: B&H, 2004); Paul E. Engel and Steve B. Cowen, ed., *Who Runs the Church? Four Views of Church Government* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2004); Gerald P. Cowen, *Who Rules the Church? Examining Congregational Leadership and Church Government* (Nashville: B&H, 2003).

pastor) elders.¹⁷⁰ As a result, because multi-site churches primarily focus their campus pastors on handling leadership development and pastoral responsibilities, these churches are poised to disciple more people more effectively.

Some reject the biblical acceptability of this formulation, arguing against allowing a teaching pastor (elder) to preach in corporate worship gatherings when that person is not regularly involved in the lives of congregational members.¹⁷¹ How can a teaching elder pastor a congregation, after all, if he is not present to shepherd the people? Mark Dever's research seems to provide biblical precedent for this type of external teaching elder model. Dever writes,

¹⁷⁰See Reavely's chapter on the "Leadership and Structure" of multi-site churches. Reavely, "An Ecclesiology for Multi-site Churches," 98-110.

Dever provides a compact NT analysis of the plurality of elders arrangement: "Does this mean the New Testament conceives of only one elder per church? On the contrary, the evidence suggests the New Testament congregations were generally led by more than one elder. Five New Testament authors referred to the office a total of twenty times. John alone referred to the office exclusively in the singular. He referred to himself as 'the elder' in his second and third letters. Apparently, he was known by this title. Assuming he was writing to people outside of his own congregation, the title may have suggested not so much an office as his wide recognition.

James, Peter, Paul, and Luke also referred to the office of elder in the church, and each of them appears to presume a plurality of elders per congregation. James instructs his Christian reader to 'call the elders [plural] of the church [singular] to pray over him' (Jas 5:14). Peter wrote as an elder to the 'elders [plural] among you' (1 Pet 5:1-5). Unless Peter was saying, 'from one old man to others,' then he assumed that a plurality of elders sits within each congregation. Paul created the bishops (plural) in the church (singular) at Philippi (Phil. 1:1). And he exhorted the elders of the church at Ephesus to be 'bishops' or 'overseers' (plural) to the 'flock' (singular) to which God had called them (Acts 20:28). Writing to Timothy and Titus, Paul again mentioned elders in the plural. He reminded Timothy of the body of elders who laid their hands on him (1 Tim 4:14). A little later he referred to the elders (plural) who directed the affairs of the church (singular) (1 Tim 5:17). And then he referred to accusations not against 'the elder,' but against 'an elder' (*presbuterou*, without an article), which would be consistent with the assumption that Timothy had multiple elders in his one congregation." Dever, "The Doctrine of the Church," 803.

Note Marshall and Payne's concern: "It is hard to avoid the conclusion that both the itinerant mission and the local congregation work were team operations. Yet somehow this vision has been lost in many churches, even within those whose history and tradition emphasizes a plurality of elders. *Over time, the model of a single ordained minister working alone to pastor a church has become the norm, even though it is strikingly different from the normal pattern of the ministry and the New Testament* [emphasis added]. Marshall and Payne, *The Trellis and the Vine*, 115.

¹⁷¹See Danny Hyde, "John Owen on Multi-Campus Ministry," Meet the Puritans [on-line]; accessed 27 November 2010; available from <http://www.meetthepuritans.com/2009/09/10/john-owen-on-multi-campus-ministries/>; Internet; and Jeffery Riddle, "Richard Baxter and the Multi-site Movement," *9Marks eJournal* 6, no. 3 (2009): 35-39.

Another question that naturally arises these days is whether the New Testament supports the position of a senior or sole pastor. While no direct New Testament evidence points to this distinction, four glimpses can be found for a leading teacher among the elders, even in these early congregations. First, some men in the New Testament, like Timothy or Titus, moved from place to place yet served as elders. Other men would have remained in one location, perhaps like the men appointed by Titus in every town (Titus 1:5). In other words, Timothy set a precedent by coming from outside of the community to act in a leadership role, even while other leaders were already set in place. Apparently, outsiders were not excluded from joining a community in order to assume primary teaching responsibilities.¹⁷²

If Dever's findings are accurate, then the senior teaching pastor and campus elder (pastor) model found within multi-site churches are supported by the biblical data. Multi-site pastors like Greear have recognized functionality of this NT plurality of elders model, and they are reaping the benefits of its application. Greear explains,

It is undeniable that large churches face pastoral issues. (It should be noted, however, that a landmark study done by Rodney Stark in 2007 showed that megachurches had more intimacy and better pastoral care than smaller churches.) That said, it is easier for people to slip in and out of a large congregation unnoticed. That is why we believe that the multi-site model is the best way for us to address the pastoral needs of our congregation.

One of the primary criticisms of a multi-site church is that you create disparate groups of people who will never know each other—perhaps never see each other! Realistically speaking, however, this happens also at any multi-service church. For that matter, it happens at any church above two hundred! The hardest ecclesiological shift for me was not in going to multiple campuses, but in growing larger than four hundred members! At that point I realized that I couldn't know every member in a meaningful way and they wouldn't all know each other, either. Large churches of all types have members who do not know each other, and not every pastor knows every member.

However, of large churches, perhaps the multi-site church most effectively addresses that problem. *Since the venues are smaller, it is easier for campus pastors and elder representatives to keep up with those that come. In other words, smaller venues reduce anonymity. It is easier for our members to be known by a pastor, be under the care and governance of our church elders, and served by campus deacons at a smaller campus rather than a large one.*¹⁷³ [emphasis added]

¹⁷²Dever, "The Doctrine of the Church," 804-05.

¹⁷³Greear, "A Pastor Defends His Multi-Site Church," 24-5. The source cited by Greear in this quotes is Rodney Stark, *What Americans Really Believe* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2008).

Mark Driscoll shares Greear's appreciation for the multi-site arrangement.

Driscoll avers that since Mars Hill Church has become multi-site, the church's capacity to care for its members has increased dramatically, and thus, as Mars Hill has grown larger (and smaller via multiple campuses), it has become more effective at pastoring and discipling the Mars Hill Church family. Driscoll declares,

Having pastored at our church from a core of about a dozen people to its present state, I can declare with complete confidence that our people are better cared for now that our church is larger than when it was smaller. I know this is controversial, but it is generally true. The advantages of a small church where people know and care for each other well occur in our small community groups. A larger church also has the resources to ensure that training is undertaken and systems are built to excellently care for people with a wide variety of personal need.

In our church this includes paying for hundreds of people to be trained in biblical counseling and having support groups for people with eating disorders, women who have had an abortion, couples fighting infertility, sexual abuse victims, sex addicts, drug and alcohol addicts, people struggling with same-sex attraction, and premarital and marital counseling. When our church was smaller I did the best I could, but in no way could I care for people as well as we do today as specialized teams. *By breaking down a church into multiple campuses, people have the benefits of a smaller church in terms of community and access to senior leadership at their campus, along with the benefits of a larger church with good preaching, music, technology, training, and care systems for hurting people. In the end we have found that the multi-campus churches have the best of both worlds.*¹⁷⁴ (emphasis added)

For both Greear and Driscoll, the role of the campus pastor is essential to the spiritual and numeric health and growth of every multi-site church, and they are not alone in this assessment.¹⁷⁵ Geoff Surratt, an expert theorist and practitioner in multi-site church development, places importance on the campus pastor role as evidenced by his

¹⁷⁴Driscoll and Breshears, *Vintage Church*, 262-63; see also, *Ibid.*, 253.

¹⁷⁵See Troy McMahon, *Campus Pastor – The First Task*, compact disc recording of breakout presentation at Multi-site Coast-to-Coast Conference, Charlestown, SC, 8-9 May 2006 (Dallas, TX: Leadership Network), 2006; and Tim Bakker, *Campus Pastor: The First Task*, podcast of breakout presentation at Multi-site Exposed Conference, Chicago, Chicago, 16 September 2008 (Dallas, TX: Leadership Network), 2008 [on-line]; accessed 27 November 2010; available from http://www.newlifesermons.com/sermons/modules.php?name=Podcasts&channel=17&start=10&search_term=&search_channel=&sort=; Internet.

description of the new campus development process used by Seacoast Church.

According to Surratt,

The first step in launching a new campus for Seacoast is to prayerfully find the right leaders. The right leaders are the key to the eventual success or failure of the campus. The most crucial leader for us is the campus pastor. For this role, we look for a high-energy individual who is a recognized leader, a team builder, a developer of other leaders and has a passion for the community he is going into. Every time we find that kind of leader, the new campus succeed. Our leadership-training model is to help develop the leader along three stages: leading a small group, leading a cluster of groups in a worship café, and ultimately, leading a campus¹⁷⁶

While the campus pastor role is essential to healthy multi-site church pastoring and discipleship, the multi-site structure demands increased involvement and commitment from church members in order to sustain healthy growth (both spiritual and numeric).¹⁷⁷ Therefore, the more a multi-site church extends geographically and numerically, the more that church becomes contingent upon the body for pastoral care and discipleship.¹⁷⁸

The priority of lay leadership in multi-site churches. In answering the critique that multi-site churches fail at producing disciples, Surratt, Ligon, and Bird show

¹⁷⁶Surratt, Ligon, and Bird, *The Multi-Site Church Revolution*, 112-13. Note Seacoast's priority on leadership development as Surratt continues his explanation: "Along with a campus pastor, we want to identify three other key leaders during the prelaunch phase. We look for worship leader to oversee all the aspects of music at the new campus, a children's ministry director, and a small groups coach. We then ask the leaders to begin identifying and developing their own team leaders well in advance of the campus launch." Ibid., 113.

¹⁷⁷Dave and Jon Ferguson's priority of selecting a campus pastor is insightful. Note the skill set they look for specifically: "Whatever you do, do not compromise or settle for second best when it comes to [the campus pastor] leadership role. This person needs to have the same skill sets as a church planter. For the past several years, we have insisted that our campus pastors be assessed in the same way we assess our lead church planters." Dave Ferguson and Jon Ferguson, *Exponential: How You and Your Friends Can Start A Missional Church Movement* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2010), 143.

¹⁷⁸Dave Browning, telephone interview by the author, 16 September 2010; see also Surratt, Ligon, and Bird, *The Multi-Site Church Revolution*, 144-45.

this concern to be nearly nullified by the nature of the multi-site church structure. Bird construes,

Some say that multi-site churches shift the focus to producing spectators rather than disciples and leaders. In other words, the multi-site paradigm, without intentionally working otherwise, will limit reproduction of leadership at every level.

We wholeheartedly agree that any model fails if it doesn't make disciples as Jesus commanded in Matthew 28:18-20. Any church is at fault, whether single-site or multiple-site, if it allows the leader to do the ministry while everyone else watches.

Again, our experience with multisite is that disciple making does occur. In fact, multi-site churches do not survive long unless they put feet to their words about developing the people of God into leaders who reproduce themselves through others, as Paul illustrates in 2 Timothy 2:2's statement about the need to train others, who in turn train others, who in turn train others. If multisite churches don't empower God's people for ministry, they fail. Some of the most exciting multisite churches model an explosion of new opportunities for God's people to do the hands-on ministry, opportunities that provide a great context for discipleship.¹⁷⁹

Consistent with Bird's analysis, there appears to be a commonality in how multi-site churches place a high premium on leadership development and discipleship. It will prove beneficial now to answer the question: "From where does this commonality come?"

According to Dave Ferguson, lead pastor of Community Christian Church, Naperville (Chicago), Illinois, and one of the prime innovators of the multi-site church movement, "A lot of what is going on in the multi-site movement comes out of Carl George's ideas of growing leaders."¹⁸⁰ George's introduction of the *Meta-Church* concept (or label) identifies the primary philosophy guiding lay leadership development

¹⁷⁹Surratt, Ligon, and Bird, *A Multi-site Road Trip*, 206-207. See Driscoll's attitude toward spectators: "If people are not tied to the campus [site] on a mission to reach their community, they inevitably become consumers only which is a sin." Driscoll and Breshears, *Vintage Church*, 255.

¹⁸⁰Dave Ferguson, interview by author, 10 September 2006, Community Christian Church, Naperville, IL. When asked, "What books have been most influential to your thinking about multi-site?", Ferguson gave two: Carl F. George, *Prepare Your Church for the Future* (Grand Rapids: Fleming H. Revell, 1992); and Carl F. George, *The Coming Church Revolution: Empowering Leaders for the Future* (Grand Rapids: Fleming H. Revell, 1994). Ibid.

strategies within multi-site churches.¹⁸¹ George explains the basic framework of the Meta-church arrangement as follows:

[Meta-churches] have blended evangelism and pastoral care with leadership development in such a way that they win people to Christ as they care for them; and as they develop new leaders, they are constantly able to expand and accommodate whatever harvest of souls the Lord of the harvest, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, is calling into the body of Jesus here on earth (Matthew 9:37-38; Luke 10:2; John 4:35; Acts 2:39-47; 2 Corinthians 10:13).¹⁸²

While not all multi-site churches embrace (or are familiar with) the Meta-Church designation, per se, most multi-site churches that multiply sites [e.g., Mars Hill Church (Seattle, Washington); Seacoast Church (Mount Pleasant, South Carolina); Christ the King Church (Mount Vernon, Washington); Community Christian Church (Naperville, Illinois)] utilize the core ideas of this concept, and as a result, place a high premium on facilitating discipleship and care processes through robust lay leadership structures.¹⁸³ As George annotates the Meta-church ideology further, strong correlations

¹⁸¹George explains the concept of *Meta-Church* as follows: “The term is *Meta-Church*. *Meta* is a Greek prefix. Most people recognize it in words like *metamorphosis*, which refers to the change in form that the caterpillar goes through on the way to becoming a butterfly. Students of the Bible may know the Greek word *metanoia*, which describes the change in one’s mind of thinking associated with repentance and conversion. Our minds and wills must “turn about” so that we no longer hold stubbornly to our former ways, which blocked us from being fully obedient to God.

Thus the idea of Meta-Church means a church in transition, a church that is turning, a church that is becoming. The full extent of where Meta-Church thinking will take us is not entirely clear. But as we study fast-growing (and therefore, in most cases, a large) churches around the globe, we are finding a new paradigm emerging.” George, *The Coming Church Revolution*, 26.

¹⁸²Ibid.

¹⁸³Consider Mars Hill’s structure, for example: “We intentionally connect the pulpit to our community groups so that after I preach, our people gather in homes to discuss the text or topic and share meals, friendship, prayer, accountability, love, support, and worship, not unlike house churches. In this way, we have essentially established our campuses as churches networked together for resource sharing, support, accountability, and training.” Driscoll and Breshears, *Vintage Church*, 257; Jon Ferguson and Eric Metcalf, *Reproducing Leaders The Most Important Task*, podcast of breakout presentation at Multi-site Exposed Conference, Chicago, 15 September 2008 (Dallas, TX: Leadership Network), 2008 [on-line]; accessed 27 November 2010; available from http://www.newlifesermons.com/sermons/modules.php?name=Podcasts&channel=17&start=10&search_term=&search_channel=&sort=; Internet; Dave Browning, “The Road Less Traveled – Toward an Organic, Relational Movement,” *video recording of plenary presentation at Multi-site Exposed Conference, Seattle, 14-15 April 2008* (Dallas, TX:

are visible between the Meta-church and multi-site structures (e.g., group multiplication, decentralization, and leadership development):

Meta-church thinking emphasizes a “re-envisioning” of how the family of God relates to one another. Consequently, it also calls for a significant shift in how ministry is perceived: the clergy’s critical event involves the formation of leaders who can provide care, rather than the clergy’s own hands-on, primary care ministry The term Meta-church also represents an accompanying change in organizational priorities and structures. It offers an alternative path to the future without the same theoretical limits that cause existing North American churches to stop growing because their quality of care has been diluted by size or other factors. The engine propelling a Meta-church and leading to an exponential growth multiplication is the Holy Spirit’s working through lay-led home-discipleship centers. These are affinity-based, spiritual-gift dependent, lay-shepherded, supervised, evangelistic, and self-reproducing. Virtually all ministry is decentralized to these groups. Such a system frees clergy to focus energies on training lay leadership.¹⁸⁴

Multi-site churches use this framework, but move beyond just the lay-led home-discipleship centers by utilizing both their small group systems and their campuses (as larger nodes, or mid-sized groups) for pastoral care and discipleship.

By their nature, at the center of healthy multiplying multi-site (and Meta-Church) structures, there exists a collaborative ministry dynamic in which clergy and laity share the responsibilities of pastoring (making disciples).¹⁸⁵ This feature of multi-site churches provides a mechanism through which the church body can experience growth while also supporting the spiritual health of its members. While the Meta-Church (and related multi-site) approaches to pastoring and shepherding may be unacceptable to

Leadership Network), 2008 [on-line]; accessed 27 November 2010; available from <http://theresurgence.com/2008/04/30/the-road-less-traveled-toward-an-organic-relational-movement-video/>; Internet.

¹⁸⁴George, *The Coming Church Revolution*, 27-28.

¹⁸⁵Larry Osborne’s description of laity empowerment via small group leadership provides a vivid example: “At Northcoast, every group has a leader and a host, most often made up of two couples. That means that in every group, we have four people who teach, counsel, disciple, pray, visit hospitals, lead

those who require the bulk of pastoral activity to rest in the hands of clergy, the strong reliance upon laity for carrying out the ministry of the church is more biblical, and thus, should be a preferred method of congregational ministry.¹⁸⁶

Suggested Pastoring Parameters for Multi-Site Churches

As churches shift to a multi-site structure, it is undeniable that there are inherent dangers of minimizing or neglecting the critical functions of shepherding and discipling. In order to provide a healthy foundation for discipleship within multi-site churches, three key pastoring parameters will be given here.

Parameter 1: Utilization of campus pastors. Churches seeking to become multi-site by adding a new campus should plan to utilize a campus pastor so that discipleship and pastoral care activities are properly addressed for the congregation meeting at that location. In situations where a campus is more transient or temporary in nature (e.g., firehouse campuses, prison campuses, etc.), a point person fitting the general qualifications of elder should be equipped for pastoring and discipling. Without a

in worship, provide Communion, and even baptize members of their little flock—none of which they would do without the platform for ministry we call growth group.” Osborne, *Sticky Church*, 51.

¹⁸⁶Hadaway, Wright, and DuBose provide strong critique for clergy-heavy shepherding: “The clergy-dominated Christianity of the Western world has widened the gap between clergy and laity in the body of Christ. This division of labor, authority, and prestige is common when a professional clergy exists and generally develops so slowly that it goes unnoticed. The pastor-shepherd has gradually evolved into the role of clergy performer who is hired by the church as their ‘Sunday-before-dinner-speaker,’ their witness to the community, and their sickbed comforter. Simultaneously, the priesthood of the believers has evolved in the direction of an audience which consumes religious truth but does not act on it. The Christian faith is weakened by this violation of *laos* [emphasis original], ‘people of God,’ which has thwarted the New Testament pattern of developing spiritual gifts in the whole body.” Hadaway, Wright, and DuBose, *Home Cell Groups and House Churches*, 203.

For an excellent model for leadership development and collaboration between clergy and laity, see Marshall and Payne, *The Trellis & the Vine*, especially pp. 41-60, 81-92, 109-126, 143-150; and Grudem’s comments on the “ordained clergy as the primary dispensers of grace within the Church.” Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 958.

campus pastor designated for each campus of a multi-site church, pastoring functions will be neglected, and the continuation of that site is severely jeopardized.

Parameter 2: Utilization of the deacon ministry. While the ministry of deacons has not been discussed to this point, there is no doubt that deacons are an essential part of healthy multi-site churches. The first reason is because deacons are an office of the church outlined within Scripture (1 Tim 3:8-13). To not have deacons or not be in the process of developing and appointing them within a church would violate the teaching of Scripture, and thus would be sin. The second reason is demonstrated in Acts 6:1-6 where the apostles appointed individuals from within the congregation to handle care and administrative duties within the church. These administrative roles were created because, in the words of the apostles, “It is not desirable for us to neglect the word of God in order to serve tables” (v. 2). In a similar way, multi-site churches, because of the organizational challenges they face (pastoral care and shepherding across multiple sites over multiple locations), require deacon roles to ensure (1) that senior leaders are able to focus on the ministry of the Word, and (2) that administrative challenges that naturally occur within churches are dealt with appropriately. In order to accommodate growing pains because of multiplication similar to those found in Acts 6, churches that become multi-sites or add additional sites would be wise to incorporate a vibrant deacon ministry to care effectively for the needs of church leaders and the congregation.

Parameter 3: Utilization of a small group system. Much like the context of large and house worship gatherings (the cell and celebration motif) found in Acts 2:42-47, multi-site churches would be wise to supplement their weekly campus gatherings

with a robust small group system. Given the decentralized nature of multi-site arrangements and their strong reliance on leadership development for growth, great care must be taken to ensure that pastoral responsibilities and discipleship processes occur well at the ground level of the church.¹⁸⁷ In order to support small groups properly, campus pastors (with the assistance of campus deacons) should make certain that small group ministry is clearly defined, well maintained, and regularly evaluated system-wide.¹⁸⁸ Further, every small group should plan for multiplication at its inception, beginning with a leadership apprentice in place who is in preparation to launch the next small group.¹⁸⁹

Multiplying: How Do We Produce More Churches?

The focus of this final section is multiplication considerations related to the expansion of multi-site churches. Within this discussion, the relationship between multi-site strategies and church planting will be explored. Five questions will steer the conversation. The section will begin by framing one of the most common queries multi-site critics ask of multi-site church practitioners and advocates: “Why don’t multi-site

¹⁸⁷See Hammett’s recognition of this need: “Megachurches that meet in multiple locations and megachurches that have multiple services raise ecclesiological questions and potential dangers that need more careful consideration than megachurch leaders have given them. *Yet, at the same time, I see nothing in the New Testament that calls megachurches per se into question, as long as they couple their large group meetings with smaller groups where individual believers can experience intimate fellowship personal construction and pastoral oversight*” [emphasis added]. Hammett, *Biblical Foundations for Baptist Churches*, 320-21.

¹⁸⁸See John Ferguson, “Five Lessons to Save You Five Years,” podcast of breakout presentation at Multi-site Exposed Conference, Chicago, Chicago, 16 September 2008 (Dallas, TX: Leadership Network), 2008 [on-line]; accessed 27 November 2010; available from http://www.newlifesermons.com/sermons/modules.php?name=Podcasts&channel=17&start=10&search_term=&search_channel=&sort=; Internet.

¹⁸⁹See Ferguson and Ferguson, *Exponential*, 24.

churches just plant more churches?” In response to this question, the answer will be provided with another question and the subsequent response to it: “What are the reasons for using the multi-site church approach?” The discussion will then turn toward answering practical questions about multi-site church multiplication. This section will then conclude with the presentation of two suggested parameters for ensuring proper multi-site church multiplication.

“Why Don’t Multi-Site Churches Just Plant More Churches?”

In his article, “Theological Defense of Multi-site,” Gregg Allison introduces one of the most common questions traditional church planting advocates lodge against multi-site proponents: “Why not just plant more churches?”¹⁹⁰ For some less comfortable with multi-site arrangements, it is assumed that multi-site site churches put church planting at risk by minimizing its importance or supplanting it altogether.¹⁹¹ White and Yeats explain some of the basis for these concerns:

Our inclination is that the multi-site methodology should be feared rather than commended. It typically creates a consumer mentality, undermines church planting, compromises ecclesiology, and focuses on numerical growth as a measure of success. Churches currently involved in a multisite movement can develop exit strategies to give independence to those sites. Sites built on community and service to Christ will be able to survive and perhaps even thrive, resulting in newly planted churches. Locations built on a personality or the entertainment-driven model are not

¹⁹⁰Allison, “Theological Defense of Multi-Site,” 16.

¹⁹¹White provides an example of this perspective. “An additional pitfall is that multi-site churches undermine church planting and the training of future preachers,” he explains. “The use of video lessens the urgency for our best pastors to replicate themselves. The immediate takes precedence over the important, and finding future leaders becomes the next generation’s problem. One wonders if such ministries can outlast the personality driving the train or if derailment lies around the corner. New church plants also suffer as congregations funnel money to the multiple locations rather than start new congregations or help revitalize dying ones. Even multi-site churches with intentional church planting strategies must recognize that resources are divided.” White, “Nine Reasons I Don’t Like Multi-site Churches,” 43.

healthy churches anyway. While recognizing this criticism rings truer with the most ambitious forms of the multisite movement, every church leader should consider the lasting implications. The most important question is, “Why not plant new, independent churches for God’s kingdom?”¹⁹²

The questions raised by Allison and amplified by White and Yeats are not without merit.

To find the answer(s), we will turn the discussion toward the insights of the multi-site practitioners and theorists who are most familiar with the concept.

“Why Do Multi-site Churches Use the Multi-site Approach?”

During a first of its kind study of 150 multi-site churches conducted in 2003 by Warren Bird of Leadership Network, survey subjects were asked why their churches chose to become multi-site. Six choices (“motivators”) were offered in the survey, and “multiple selections were allowed.”¹⁹³ Those “motivators” for becoming multi-site were as follows, including their subsequent response percentages: “(1) Evangelistic outreach (55%), (2) Bring our church closer to target area (21%), (3) Solve overcrowding problems (19%), (4) Offer multiple styles (10%), (5) Bring community-building resources closer to our people (6%), and (6) Reach niche group (nursing home, new

¹⁹²White and Yeats, *Franchising McChurch*, 163. The claims made by the authors here are substantial. Unfortunately, they do not offer empirical evidence to validate their findings. Additionally, White and Yeats also purport that multi-site church fail to decentralize and cannot “reach” as many people as church plants. They write, “Instead of franchising a branded version of Christianity, churches should rediscover the Scriptural form of decentralization: church planting. We understand that some of these churches consider their campuses as church plants in the community. If the main campus controls all the events of the satellite locations and forces the preaching of the main campus pastor the video, there is no decentralization, and it should not count as a church plant. It is simply a franchise of the main congregation. Churches that plant other churches with the DNA to plant other churches will have a long-term ability to reach greater numbers of people. Sure it costs the ‘birthing’ church. Sometimes it even tallies costs that aren’t recuperated for some time, but the pattern of the early church was to plant. In a postmodern context, can we get back to the decentralized, church planting movement that turned the ancient world upside down?” *Ibid.*, 89.

¹⁹³Bird, “Survey of 1,000 Multi-Site Churches,” 3.

language group, etc.) (3%).”¹⁹⁴

In June 2003, Warren Bird and Greg Ligon wrote a separate article, entitled “Extending Your Church to More than One Place: A Field Report on the Emerging Multi-Site Movement.”¹⁹⁵ Within their field report, Bird and Ligon provided 13 “Advantages of Multi-Site, Multi-Venue Ministry” based on what they had seen and appraised from their interactions with multi-site churches. Here are the advantages as they shared them:

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.

¹⁹⁴Ibid.

¹⁹⁵Warren Bird and Greg Ligon, “Extending Your Church to More than One Place: A Field Report on the Emerging Multi-Site Movement,” Leadership Network, 16 [on-line]; accessed 23 June 2006; available from www.leadnet.org; Internet.

13. Provides a “pipeline” for the development of emerging leaders and future staff.¹⁹⁶

Taken together, the survey and the field report explain why early multi-site churches elected to employ the multi-site church strategy.

Since 2003, multi-site churches have become more plentiful, and early adopters have had time to hone their understanding of what it means to be a multi-site church. Many others have asked and answered the question, “Why go multi-site?” In the process, they have also demonstrated how churches benefit from using multi-site approaches. Essentially, the responses offered by Bird and Ligon (in their 2003 study) and the various answers crafted by others since collectively reveal three general reasons why churches choose to become multi-site.

Multi-site strategies are an effective approach to reaching more people.

As verified by Bird’s research above and in his 2010 “Multi-site is Multiplying” project written with Kristin Walters, the majority of multi-site churches embrace the strategy in large part because they want to reach people who do not know Christ.¹⁹⁷ Easum and Travis’ affirm this reality: “The key to understanding the multi-site movement is to remember that fulfilling the Great Commission drives these congregations, not a growth strategy.”¹⁹⁸ Two specific aspects of the multi-site approach contribute to its effectiveness in reaching the dechurched and the unchurched.

The first aspect is related to church size. Because churches that use the multi-

¹⁹⁶Ibid.

¹⁹⁷Bird and Walters, “Multisite Is Multiplying,” 3.

¹⁹⁸Easum and Travis, *Beyond the Box*, 85. It is worth noting that no research has surfaced to date that demonstrates clearly the evangelistic effectiveness of multi-site churches or the multi-site church

site approach are generally larger in terms of membership, attendance, and worship facilities, they naturally face difficulty in connecting individuals to the congregation within corporate worship. When a church shifts to multiple sites or venues, smaller worship gatherings generally ensue, and thus multi-site churches at once become bigger numerically but smaller congregationally.¹⁹⁹ This shift is important for individual connectivity because, as Peter Roebelen observes, “The fabric of the community changes when you get beyond a certain size . . . [200 people].” He explains “You can do stuff in a group of 200 that you never dream of doing in a group of 2000.”²⁰⁰

Creating additional and smaller worship gatherings is beneficial because within smaller congregations individuals have a greater likelihood of connecting relationally to others. Fewer attendees means there are more opportunities for interaction between people of a limited number of people. Further, there is also a historic correlation between church age and size and evangelistic effectiveness. Generally speaking, churches that are younger and smaller demonstrate higher baptismal rates and lower conversion ratios than

movement. Further research is needed in this area, especially related to the conversion versus transfer growth of multi-sites.

¹⁹⁹Browning and the Christ the King Church family reject this designation, instead choosing the “more over bigger” label. Browning explains: “Some may look at [our church] and see that it is small pieces loosely joined, and conclude that we prefer small over big. We don’t, actually. We prefer more over bigger. That is we want to reach an unlimited number of people (more people than you could ever put anyone facility), but we feel that the best way to do this is to be in an unlimited number of places. This is our “theory of the business,” what Peter Drucker described as the important work of defining the environment of the organization, where intellect and spirit the line. For instance, Sam Walton, founder of Wal-Mart, articulated his theory of business with his famous declaration, “I will continue to reduce prices as long as I live.” Our theory of business, where intellect and spirit aligned for us, is to be one church with many ministries, here, they are, and everywhere. Individually, none of them may be that sizable, but together they will present a formidable influence on the culture. This is what gives us our energy.” Browning, *Deliberate Simplicity*, 142.

²⁰⁰Peter Roebelen, telephone interview by the author, 11 September 2009.

larger churches.²⁰¹ Thus, when a larger church (multi-site or single-site) launches a new site, campus, or venue, the church poises itself to be more effective evangelistically because they take on the attributes of newness and smallness.²⁰²

Second, when churches employ the multi-site strategy, their locus of ministry is forced beyond the site and situation of the original church campus or building. The church is thereby able to increase its level of gospel saturation throughout an area because they gain additional points of entry for gospel proclamation in word and deed.²⁰³ As the church expands geographically, the congregation is moved closer to populations it is attempting to reach. The more relationships church members are able to cultivate in that area, as Greear notes, “the more effective can be its evangelism and community outreach.”²⁰⁴

Multi-site strategies are an effective approach to stewarding resources. As churches become larger and require increasing amounts of space to accommodate ministry functions, expansion costs can limit or even negate the growth of a congregation. Even if a church grows to a point of adding multiple services on Sunday

²⁰¹Clay Price and Philip Jones, “A Study of the Relationship of Church Size and Age to Number of Baptism and Baptism Rates,” (mimeographed document prepared for the Department of Church Extension, Home Mission Board, Southern Baptist Convention, Atlanta, GA, 1978); Ferguson and Ferguson, *Exponential*, 166-67. See also, David Olson, *The American Church in Crisis* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2008).

²⁰²Consider Chaney, *Church Planting at the End of the Twentieth Century*, 120.

²⁰³Ezell explains it this way: As a church makes the multi-site jump, that body “broadens its evangelistic appeal. [It goes] from having one hook to a trout line in the water.” Kevin Ezell, telephone interview by the author, 12 September 2010. More than a decade earlier, Schaller made a similar observation: “[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.” Schaller, *Discontinuity and Hope*, 178-79.

²⁰⁴Greear, “A Pastor Defends His Multi-Site Church,” 24.

morning or throughout a week, a time comes when spatial limitations at one location are exceeded. When a church elects to become multi-site, it adopts an approach to structure that enables that church to become a more responsible fiscal steward of growth.²⁰⁵ This stewardship is visible in at least two areas.

The first area of stewardship is related to the bricks and mortar costs of church facilities. As congregational worship attendance grows, a church must provide more space to house worship gatherings as well as related ministry functions such as childcare and education. Historically, in North America the common solution to these growth issues has been to build larger buildings with larger worship areas. Herein lies a significant problem, and Greear explains how multi-site offers a remedy to it:

The multi-site strategy is a more financially responsible response to growth than building a huge building. Buildings are expensive. Large buildings are enormously expensive. They are also inefficient uses of space. Large auditoriums (that seat several thousand people) are difficult to use for any other purpose than one weekly assembly of the entire church body.²⁰⁶

What the multi-site arrangement grants, then, is the opportunity for a church to continue to grow in attendance without the usual costs related to facility expansion, including land purchase, building construction, parking, and so forth. Dave Travis of Leadership Network elaborates further on one implication of this change: “We used to have an issue where churches had reached a point in their growth cycle where they were being limited by their building or their community. That conversation has changed. Now there are fewer relocations because people are focusing on adding additional sites.”²⁰⁷

²⁰⁵Ibid., 22.

²⁰⁶Ibid.

²⁰⁷Dave Travis, telephone interview by the author, 16 September 2010.

The second area of stewardship is a matter of lower costs related to economies of scale. When a church becomes multi-site, the creation of additional sites is far less costly in terms of time, energy, and especially in terms of finances, than creating a new church, as Peter Roebbelen says, “from scratch.”²⁰⁸ Early in the development process of multi-site churches (1993), Easum recognized this benefit when he documented that within the multiple-site congregations “overhead costs are reduced.”²⁰⁹ On this topic, Greear again provides keen insight:

The multi-site model allows churches to save much of the money usually spent on a building. Venues in which smaller congregations can meet are much more plentiful and can be rented on a Sunday or, if owned, can be used throughout the week for other purposes. Jim Tomberlin, who has written a great deal on the multi-site movement, notes that a multi-site strategy is usually a zero-sum game, financially speaking. Most campuses will make up the money spent on startup costs within the first year.²¹⁰

Resource maximization is not limited to worship space utilization, however. The multi-site formulation provides other intrinsic savings not as clearly visible. Consider, for example, the savings (and thus benefits) related to the following matters highlighted by Surratt, Ligon, and Bird:

The advantages of being multisite include greater accountability, sharing of resources (stewardship), the infusion of trained workers, shared DNA (mission and core values), greater prayer support, a preestablished network for problem solving, not needing to reinvent the wheel, in connection with others doing the same thing.²¹¹

Thus, multi-site churches because of their *interdependent* nature and connectivity can

²⁰⁸Peter Roebbelen, telephone interview by the author, 11 September 2009.

²⁰⁹Bill Easum, *Dancing with Dinosaurs: Ministry in A Hostile & Hurting World* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1993), 92.

²¹⁰Greear, “A Pastor Defends His Multi-Site Church,” 22-23.

²¹¹Surratt, Ligon, and Bird, *A Multi-site Road Trip*, 40.

actually facilitate greater health and productivity church-wide.²¹² It is based upon this understanding that Ferguson and Ferguson conclude: “What we discovered [in our self-evaluation of multi-site] was that our new campuses cost less money to start, resulted in greater retention, and reached more people.”²¹³

Finally, it is worth mentioning that when comparing multi-site launching to single-site church planting, specifically in terms of resource stewardship, the former is far more cost effective than the latter for two reasons.²¹⁴ First, according to Allison’s research, traditional “church planting efforts are generally thirty percent more costly than multi-site efforts.”²¹⁵ Second, as Bird and Walter’s data demonstrates: “Multi-site churches have a 90% percent success rate. Only 10% of surveyed churches report that they have had campus closures.”²¹⁶ While church planting success figures vary from source to source, it is highly unlikely that the average North American church planting success rate is above 50 percent.

In sum, the stewardship benefits inherent to multi-site structures provide clear

²¹²While the multi-site strategy can be a potent tool, its use does not guarantee that a church will become more effective or that every church will experience success with multi-site permanently. Several examples of early multi-site churches demonstrate that multi-site strategies do present inherent challenges that may become too costly or challenging for a church to maintain over time. Perimeter Church, Atlanta, GA, Chartwell Baptist Church, Oakville, Ontario, and Mount Paran Church of God, Atlanta, all reached a point in their church lifecycle when their multi-site arrangements no longer proved most effective for their ministry future.

²¹³Ferguson and Ferguson, *Exponential*, 152.

²¹⁴Note Easum’s response to the question: “What are the benefits of a church going multi-site?” Easum gives six: “(1) 90 percent effective, (2) passes on good DNA, (3) cheaper than church planting, (4) easier than church planting, (5) the campus pastor is not alone [versus a church planter], and (6) the campus pastor has more resources [than a church planter].” Bill Easum, telephone interview by the author, 16 September 2009.

²¹⁵Allison, “Theological Defense of Multi-site,” 16.

²¹⁶Bird and Walters, “Multisite is Multiplying,” 3.

validation for why the multi-site arrangement is a more satisfactory response to growth challenges than the continued enlargement of a single-church, and in some ways, the planting of new churches.²¹⁷ In no way does (or should) this conclusion relegate or denigrate traditional church planting.²¹⁸ This topic will be addressed more fully later in the chapter. At the same time, these findings prove the value of the multi-site strategy as a responsible mechanism facilitating the growth and expansion of a church.

Multi-site strategies are an effective approach to multiplying ministries and leadership. Those within and close to the multi-site church movement argue strongly that the multi-site church structure facilitates greater multiplication of ministries and leaders. The ability of multi-sites churches to multiply is generally attributable to the combination of two factors.

The first factor is the mobilization of laity into church leadership.²¹⁹ Returning to the “Questions for ‘Questions for McChurch’” exchange between Geoff Surratt and Ed Stetzer, the latter opines: “Perhaps my biggest concern with the multi-site paradigm is that it may inadvertently lead to a diminished pool of biblical leaders.”²²⁰ In response, Surratt explains why Stetzer’s concern is unfounded, at least within his experience. Surratt explicates,

(1) We have seen the exact opposite effect since we have opened multiple campuses; rather than a diminished pool of biblical leaders we now have an ocean

²¹⁷Dave Travis, telephone interview by the author, 16 September 2010.

²¹⁸After evaluating the effects and implications of the multi-site church concept, Allison notes: “In actuality, then, this approach may contribute to church planting in the long run.” Allison, “Theological Defense of Multi-site,” 16.

²¹⁹See Bird and Walters, “Multisite is Multiplying,” 3.

²²⁰Stetzer, “Questions for ‘Questions for McChurch’ – Thursday, June 5 2008.”

of biblical leaders. Every site we open creates multiple opportunities for emerging leaders to step up to the plate. I had lunch today with a young man at one of our sites who has been on our youth staff for several years, but now feels a desire to move into a larger role. In a traditional church he would have to leave and plant a church because there would be few if any other opportunities for leadership within our church. Because we are a large, multi-site church we were able to look at a wide range of leadership opportunities from department leader to campus pastor to church planter. He is a biblical leader that is being groomed for big things down the road rather than put out on his own to sink or swim.

(2) We have many biblical leaders who do not have the gift of teaching. It is surprising to me that somehow biblical leadership and the ability to stand up and talk for 30 minutes on a Sunday somehow have become equated. It is also surprising that a 30-minute homily is seen as the primary tool to speak into the lives of a congregation. In our campuses our campus pastors lead and teach in dozens of ways every day; the only thing they don't do is teach for 30 minutes most Sundays.

(3) We have also found multi-site to be a great way to prepare church planters. Naeem Fazal, who now pastors Mosaic Church in Charlotte [North Carolina], was our first campus pastor. It was a great leadership incubator and Naeem now ministers to almost 1000 20-somethings [*sic*] every weekend. He is only one of many biblical leaders who we have had the opportunity to develop through the multi-site ministry.²²¹

If Surratt's background with multi-site churches is normative, then it demonstrates that multi-site churches would generally do a better job at developing more and stronger leaders in a variety of areas and levels within a multi-site church.²²²

The second factor is the natural proclivity of multi-site churches toward ministry expansion and reproduction.²²³ Once a church begins to expand beyond one

²²¹Geoff Surratt, as quoted in Stetzer's blog, Ed Stetzer, "Questions for 'Questions for McChurch' – Thursday, June 5 2008." Surratt gives a fourth point that precedes the other three: "I assume you are equating multi-site with video teaching. While many prominent multi-site churches use video teaching there are also many churches who use in-person teaching." Ibid.

Consider findings from the Leadership Network's most recent study of multi-site churches: "Multisites show a healthy commitment to replication within their congregations. Despite the fact that most multisite campuses are less than 10 years old themselves, 1 in 5 of these satellites campuses have already birthed a 'grandchild' campus. Eight percent of that group has launched 2 to 9 campuses. And impressively, 1 percent of the multisite campuses who took part in the survey have already started 10 or more additional campuses." Bird and Walters, "Multisite is Multiplying," 21.

²²²Allison reaches the same conclusion. Allison, "Theological Defense of Multi-site," 16.

²²³Carl George, telephone interview by the author, 17 September 2010; Gary McIntosh, telephone interview by the author, 13 September 2010.

location into a multi-site arrangement, that church automatically enters into a decentralizing process as a congregation. As the church becomes decentralized, the focus of the congregation extends beyond the physical and geographic boundaries of the church. Dave Travis explains what happens: This process “gets [the church] beyond thinking about the neighbors around the church.”²²⁴ The church, in turn, becomes more missional.²²⁵

Simultaneously, in order to support the addition of another site or sites, individuals within the church body must take on more responsibility in order to facilitate the growth of the church. As growth ensues, those involved within the multi-site experience begin to see the multiplying process of leaders, groups, and sites as more of a normalized or status quo process. Not surprisingly, a healthy concept of unity within the body of Christ also becomes evident via this multiplication.²²⁶

²²⁴Dave Travis, telephone interview by the author, 16 September 2006.

²²⁵Allison amplifies: “The multi-site concept is a way of embracing a strong missionality.” Gregg Allison, telephone interview by the author, 15 September 2010. He continues: “What’s great is that we can have the same church with one DNA and [we can] spread it in different venues and geographical areas in a community. Those sites are contextually developed to teach and engage people socially and economically.” Ibid.

²²⁶Consider Allison’s biblical unity argument as theological validation for multi-site churches: “The New Testament emphasis on love, unity, cooperation, and interdependence certainly addresses the sanctified reality that should characterize churches individually. But I wonder if these virtues should be extended beyond the local church level to address the sanctified reality that should characterize churches together in a particular locale. Examples such as the Jerusalem council (Acts 15) and the raising of money from the churches of Macedonia for the relief of the Jerusalem church (2 Cor 8-9) developed on the basis of such love, unity, cooperation, and interdependence.

When we come to multi-site churches, then, are we that far removed from this theological ground? This notion appears among proponents of the multi-site approach. For example, Richard Kaufmann of Harbor Presbyterian Church says, ‘I think the whole concept of cooperating as churches is a significant theological point in order to demonstrate the unity of the Christian body.’ Drew Goodmanson of Kaleo Church in San Diego likewise says, ‘with multi-site strategies you give the city witness to kingdom expression as seen in the unity of multiple sites working together.’

This theological emphasis on unity is often cited as a key reason for preferring multiplying campuses rather than multiplying church plants: when a new church is spun off, the mother church and the daughter church quickly move away from each other and stop cooperating.

Stetzer highlights the implications of this proclivity toward multiplication when he explains why some churches chose multi-site arrangement over church planting: “Many congregations are moving to a multi-site strategy for this reason: a new church may take years to get a footing, but an extension site of an established church will grow immediately. Instead of starting with 20 attendees, they may start with hundred.”²²⁷

Having established the primary reasons why churches chose to employ multi-site structures, the discussion will now move to answering three questions regarding practical questions of multi-site application. We will begin with what is perhaps the most urgent question.

“Does the Multi-site Approach Replace Church Planting?”

The concern over whether multi-site processes will replace church planting is not limited to multi-site detractors. As Bird and Walters reveal, even those utilizing multi-site structures fear that multi-site can overshadow church planting: “Several of the participants in [the “Multi-site is Multiplying”] survey expressed concern about the impact of a multi-site strategy on the starting of new churches. ‘I hope you are still thinking about church planting aside from multi-site,’ one person wrote.”²²⁸

Paul lists fifteen ‘works of the flesh’ (sin nature) in Galatians 5:19-21, and eight of them focus on disunity and division within the church: ‘enmity, strife, jealousy, fits of anger, rivalries, dissensions, divisions, envy.’ He addresses these sins with dire seriousness: ‘I warn you, as I warned you before, that those who do such things will not inherit the kingdom of God’ (5:21). Because such sin is so entrenched with our churches today, we should pause and ask whether or not multi-site churches better embody these virtues than most independent churches today. After all, the very structure of the multi-site church explicitly stands against such sins in order to promote the opposite values of love, unity, cooperation, and interdependence.” Allison, “Theological Defense of Multi-Site,” 12.

²²⁷Stetzer, “Foreword” in McConnell, *Multi-Site Churches*, x.

²²⁸Bird and Walters, “Multisite is Multiplying,” 21.

To enter this discussion (or debate), it would be helpful first to differentiate between multi-site expansion and church planting. Bird and Walter's work again proves helpful: "In terms of definition, the chief difference between the two is this: for multi-sites the different campuses are all part of one church under one senior leader, while church plants represent a new congregation with a separate board and budget."²²⁹ Clearly, this differentiation is simple, but it will suffice for the remainder of the discussion.

Based on this dichotomization, some, like Jonathan Leeman for example, contend that multi-site expansion and church planting "are alternatives to one another."²³⁰ Others, like Scott McConnell, purport that,

The multi-site strategy does not replace any other method of participating in Kingdom Growth. *It does not replace church planting* [emphasis added], personal evangelism, visitation programs, investing and inviting, serving evangelism, or evangelism training.

By definition, multi-site involves starting a site somewhere other than your current campus. This quickly draws some comparisons to church planting. While many of the goals, experiences, and characteristics look similar, new sites and church plants are traveling different routes to require different vision, resourcing, and style of leadership [emphasis added].²³¹

Still others, like Gary McIntosh, reason,

I just think [multi-site] is another way of planting churches. My guess is that long term, multi-sites will not last. I think in most cases churches will separate and split into new churches. This is what I saw in the old satellite model where the pastor drove from place to place. When the visionary pastor left, those satellites went independent.²³²

Each of these viewpoints gives important perspectives on evaluating whether

²²⁹Ibid.

²³⁰Jonathan Leeman, telephone interview by the author, 22 September 2010.

²³¹McConnell, *Multi-Site Churches*, 17.

²³²Gary McIntosh, telephone interview by the author, 13 September 2010. McIntosh's conclusion, especially regarding the long term of multi-site entities, is both intuitive and appropriate.

or not multi-site strategies will replace church planting. In the end, however, the evidence shows (as will be seen shortly) that multi-sites will not replace church planting because as Allison notes, “they are not exclusive strategies.”²³³ Are there those that will neglect church planting and choose to become multi-site instead? Yes there are.²³⁴ At the same time, at least 10 percent of those churches Scott McConnell and his LifeWay research team interviewed for the book *Multi-site Churches* had done both multi-site and church planting.²³⁵

One of the reasons some perceive tension surrounding the multi-site versus church planting discussion is identified in Ed Stetzer and Warren Bird’s book, *Viral Churches*. Stetzer and Bird astutely note,

The explosion over the last five years of both new church plants and new multisite churches has been phenomenal, and the lines between the two are becoming more and more blurred. In the end, church planting doesn’t have to be an either-or question. Instead, as Seacoast, Community Christian, New Hope, West Ridge and others have demonstrated, it can be a both-and.²³⁶

This “blurring of the lines” articulated by Stetzer and Bird is realized in statements like those of Bob Hyatt of Evergreen Community Church, Portland, Oregon, and Mark Driscoll of Mars Hill, Seattle, Washington. In a *Christianity Today* (October 2009) article, Hyatt explains, “Multi-site is a step toward church planting. We can develop leaders in all areas of ministry while maintaining a smaller gathering size. It

²³³Gregg Allison, cited in “Should Multi-site Campuses Be Church Plants Instead?” *Christianity Today*, 29 September 2009 Vol. 53 No. 10, 1.

²³⁴Ibid.

²³⁵Scott McConnell, telephone interview by the author, 6 December 2009.

²³⁶Ed Stetzer and Warren Bird, *Viral Churches: Helping Church Planters Become Movement Makers* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2010), 137.

gives us all the benefits of a church plant without most of the risk. It's something new in a new space, yet doesn't have to be instantaneously self-sustaining."²³⁷ Driscoll draws a strong correlation between the two growth mechanisms as well:

Each campus must be treated as a church plant with a clear mission to reach its community. It must be more than just an overflow room for a main campus; it must be a Missional extension of a church into a culture or area with programming and style that is more effective for contextualizing the Gospel. A campus does not simply replicate what is done elsewhere, like a franchise. In addition, a campus is not set up for church consumers; people have to do all the grunt work that normal church plants do, such as remodeling, setting up and tearing down, and generous giving.²³⁸

Key voices throughout the multi-site church movement demonstrate a consensus that multi-site strategies *and* church planting should exist side by side. Larry Osborne, pastor of Northcoast Church, Vista, California, says, "It's a both/and world. We need church plants and multisite."²³⁹ J.D. Greear, The Summit Church, Durham, North Carolina, makes a similar statement: "We believe you should multiply services/campuses AND plant churches."²⁴⁰ Dave and Jon Ferguson of Community Christian Church, Naperville, Illinois, give further verification: "We have had the opportunity to start both new churches and new campuses, and we believe that every

²³⁷Bob Hyatt, cited in "Should Multi-site Campuses Be Church Plants Instead?" *Christianity Today*, 29 September 2009 Vol. 53 No. 10, 1.

²³⁸Driscoll and Breshears, *Vintage Church*, 252.

²³⁹Bob Hyatt, "Should Multi-site Campuses Be Church Plants Instead?", 1.

²⁴⁰J. D. Greear, "Multi-site vs. Church Planting," JDGreear.com, 22 October 2008 [on-line]; accessed 29 January 2009; available from http://jdgreear.typepad.com/my_weblog/2008/10/multi-site-are-vs-churhc-planting.html; Internet. Greear goes on to say: "Ecclesiologically, there is no substantive difference I can find between multiple services on one campus or services on multiple campuses throughout the city. Both are ways to accommodate the growth of God brings to one congregation. Churches that do this should also be planting churches IN THEIR OWN CITY [emphasis original], as they will capitalize on new leadership and reach a whole new set of people. We want to plant 1000 churches in the next 40 years, and I hope that at least 20 of those are in the Triangle. To say it briefly, satellite campuses are an alternative to multiple services and bigger sanctuaries, not to church planting." Ibid.

church should be involved in both of these endeavors!”²⁴¹

Some may contest that multi-site practitioners are merely assenting verbally to the idea of church planting. Again, there will be those guilty of this inconsistency between preaching and practice. Evidence shows, however, that multi-site churches are indeed planting churches, and in some cases multi-sites are planting churches at increasing rates.²⁴² Surratt, Ligon, and Bird provide two prime examples. The first is found in Rolling Meadows, Illinois, where Harvest Bible Chapel, led by pastor James McDonald has planted 39 churches and has gone to four campuses.²⁴³ The authors also highlight a familiar church on the West Coast:

Saddleback Church, where Rick Warren is pastor, has planted several dozen churches across Southern California. In 2006 Saddleback also went multi-site, and they have plans to develop ten campuses across Orange County by 2010 while also continuing to plant new churches.²⁴⁴

Stetzer and Bird go even further by asking, “Could multi-site also be an effective church-planting model?” Their answer is “absolutely!” They cite Wayne Cordeiro, pastor of New Hope Christian Fellowship, Honolulu, Hawaii, for whom multi-

²⁴¹Ferguson and Ferguson, *Exponential*, 151.

²⁴²Bird and Walters, “Multisite is Multiplying,” 21. Cf. Bird and Walters’ findings with Surratt, Ligon, Bird’s conclusions on multi-site churches creating church multiplication networks: “Other churches had developed entire organizations to support this two-track [multi-site and church planting] approach. In 2001 Seacoast . . . was a founding member of the Association of Related Churches [ARC], an organization designed to help foster church planting. Community Christian Church . . . in Naperville, Illinois, has nine campuses and has created the New Thing Network, an organization that serves as a catalyst for developing a movement of reproducing churches. Leaders who are part of the New Thing Network can travel on either track, becoming part of a multisite campus or helping launch an affiliate, independent congregation.” Surratt, Ligon, and Bird, *A Multi-site Road Trip*, 39.

²⁴³*Ibid.*, 202.

²⁴⁴*Ibid.*, 39. Interestingly, Geoff Surratt, formerly of Seacoast Church, Mount Pleasant, South Carolina will assume leadership of the church planting team at Saddleback effective January 2011.

site has become “part of an intentional church planting plan.”²⁴⁵ Surratt, Ligon, and Bird explain further,

“Our goal for satellites is not necessarily to add locations,” explains [Cordeiro]. “It is to develop new leaders. It is to age these emerging leaders into their own teaching, where one day we can release them as stand-alone churches. When young leaders go out with this model, they have time to build relationships, develop teams, think about evangelism projects, do community outreach, and build leaders,” he says.²⁴⁶

Based on the personal responses of multi-site practitioners and their track record for multiplying campuses as well as church plants, it is clear that church planting and multi-site expansion are not mutually exclusive. Moreover, it is apparent that when applied appropriately the two processes can be symbiotic, mutually benefiting one another and the churches that employ them.²⁴⁷

At this junction the discussion will turn to a second important subject of multi-site multiplication. It is a question of multi-site churches and their relationship to geography.

“How Far Should Multi-Site Churches Extend Geographically?”

The *Economist* published an article entitled “The Death of Distance” in the fall of 1995. It was the year the Internet went public.²⁴⁸ The article’s predictions were bold, ostentatious, and incisive. Its author(s) wrote the following,

²⁴⁵Stetzer and Bird, *Viral Churches*, 134.

²⁴⁶Surratt, Ligon, and Bird, *A Multi-site Road Trip*, 37.

²⁴⁷Consider Greear’s assertion that “The multi-site strategy facilitates church planting.” Greear, “A Pastor Defends His Multi-site Church,” 23-24. His argument is concise and potent.

²⁴⁸Consider Godin’s analysis: “Geography used to be important . . . Now the Internet eliminates geography.” Seth Godin, *Tribes: We Need You to Lead Us* (New York: Portfolio, 2008), 4.

The death of distance as a determinant of the cost of communications will probably be the single most economic force shaping society in the first half of the next century. It will alter, in ways that are only dimly imaginable, decisions about where people live and work; concepts of national borders; patterns of international trade. The death of distance will mean that any activity that relies on a screen or a telephone can be carried out anywhere in the world.²⁴⁹

What might have been unimaginable 15 years ago has become a present reality. The limitations of distance are becoming less challenging, and while not “dead” necessarily, distance is becoming less of an obstacle to many human activities, including participating in church.²⁵⁰

Within the multi-site church movement, there are those who have embraced the death of distance idea for the purpose of extending a single church to sites across the United as well as to international destinations across the globe.²⁵¹ Even for one who values and esteems the multi-site church concept, this arrangement seems to press the boundaries of a single church beyond linguistic, cultural, and perhaps most importantly, relational limits.²⁵²

²⁴⁹“The Death of Distance,” *The Economist*, 30 September 1995, 5. See also, Francis Cairncross, *The Death of Distance: How the Communications Revolution Will Change Our Lives* (Boston: Harvard Business School Press, 1997), 89; and David B. Audrestsch and Maryann P. Feldman, “The Telecommunications Revolution and the Geography of Innovation,” in *Cities in the Telecommunications Age: The Fracturing of Geographies*, ed. James O. Wheeler, Yuko Aoyama, and Barney Wolf (New York: Routledge, 2000), 181.

²⁵⁰McConnell’s analysis is noteworthy: “A local church can have locations that are not local. Yes, it is an oxymoron. Yes, it can be hard to envision. Yes, it can blur the lines between church and Association of churches. But, yes, multi-site churches can have sites out of state, across the country, and even around the world . . .” McConnell, *Multi-site Churches*, 134.

²⁵¹Examples include The Healing Place Church, Baton Rouge, LA; Christ the King Community Church, Mount Vernon, WA; and New Song Church, Los Angeles, CA.

²⁵²See Stetzer’s testimony on this subject: “I (Ed) was recently in a meeting with 50 or so well-known evangelical leaders who wanted to plant 5 million churches world-wide—a worthy goal, indeed. One pastor—of one of the largest churches with the best-known multi-site strategy—suggested the answer: we need video being used in mission stations around the world. He did so with a straight face (though I struggled to keep mine as I considered an African man with a hand-cranked generator under a tree in Kenya

Of course there are situations in which these boundaries (or aspects thereof) may be lessened or virtually nullified. Dave Browning provides such an example in his chronicling of how a small group of professionals from Johannesburg, South Africa, solicited Christ the King Community Church (CTK), Mount Vernon, Washington, about extending CTK to their homeland.²⁵³ After paying their own way to make the trip, the group spent two weeks with CTK leadership to learn their church model and methods.²⁵⁴ Fourteen months after their return to South Africa, the small band facilitated the launch of “eight worship centers each with more than 100 people in Johannesburg alone.”²⁵⁵

In situations like this one, where cultural barriers are less of an impediment to communication and community, the idea of international multi-site churches is at least somewhat palatable. At the same time, while the NT does demonstrate flexibility in the idea of *ekklesia*, it seems that at some point a line should be drawn between what constitutes a single church and multiple churches. For example, if people cannot communicate with one another because they speak different languages, can they really live out what it means to be the church together? Is there some point at which cultural differences and mores become too great a barrier for different groups of people to function as one church? By no means do these questions suggest that multiple cultures cannot be a part of a single church (contra Acts 2:4-47). It does, however, acknowledge that a gathering of believers in which communication cannot occur precludes the

watching a white man in a three-piece suit). The reality is that there are cultural differences that must be taken into consideration.” Towns, Stetzer, and Bird, *11 Innovations in the Local Church*, 92.

²⁵³McConnell, *Multi-site Churches*, 136.

²⁵⁴Ibid.

²⁵⁵Ibid.

possibility of biblical community.

Mark Driscoll's critique of the Internet church concept well applies to this concern. Driscoll argues, "I believe technology is in no way a substitute for life-on-life, face-to-face, actual Christian community where the . . . characteristics of the church are present."²⁵⁶ Like current Internet church arrangements in which group members cannot carry out life-on-life, face-to-face community interaction, multi-site churches attempting to bridge expansive distances (geographically, culturally, and relationally) as a single church outstretch the characteristics of what it means to be and do church. A multi-site church cannot function as a single church when those comprising their congregations do not possess the ability to express corporately what Driscoll labels, the "characteristics of a church."

Should the idea of a global multi-site church be rejected? The answer is an unequivocal, "Yes." Could a multi-site church use multi-site strategies to launch new churches that begin as part of their multi-site congregation, indigenize over time, and then become independent churches or a part of a church network arrangement? This arrangement is tenable and far more preferable. Dave Gibbons, pastor of New Song Church, Los Angeles, California, initiated a multi-site arrangement in which this type of multi-site planting process could work well. Surratt, Ligon, and Bird detail it:

In 2001, New Song faced the inevitable: its location began to limit its ability to reach more people with the good news about Jesus. Sensing God's leading to think outside the box, New Song determined not to let land be a limitation. After exploring options, launching a multisite ministry seems to be the best fit for the

²⁵⁶Surratt, Ligon, and Bird, *A Multi-site Roadtrip*, 96. Driscoll lists eight characteristics of the Church based on his reading of Acts 2:42-47. Those characteristics are as follows: (1) regenerated church membership, (2) qualified leadership, (3) preaching and worship, (4) rightly administering sacraments, (5) unity through the Holy Spirit, (6) holiness, (7) the Great Commandment to love, and 8) the Great Commission to evangelize and make disciples." Ibid.

New Song “rib.” Today multiple locations are serving to empower more people in the ministry of reconciliation as urban-suburban synergies are leveraged. Movement into diverse parts of the city of Los Angeles enabled the division of being a multicultural church to find fuller expression. The urban-suburban synergy was also extended to an international expression: in 2005, New Song established a campus in Bangkok, Thailand.

Why Bangkok? Dave (whose ethnic background is Asian-American, not Thai), was traveling there, and his eyes were opened to the great spiritual need and receptivity in that city. His family confirmed that calling saying, “Let’s go.”

So in the summer of 2005, the Gibbons family moved 8000 miles away to Bangkok, with the intention of staying there for at least a year. He remains the lead pastor of New Song Church, returning to Los Angeles every few weeks. He has developed a preaching team of about 10 people in Los Angeles, and he took several people with him to Thailand—the advance team that arrived six months before the launch. His goal at that point was to identify and nurture the indigenous leadership and help them to own this site.²⁵⁷

While NewSong’s efforts in international missions and cross-cultural evangelization and discipling are praiseworthy and commendable, helping local leaders simply to achieve mere site ownership is not the ideal outcome.²⁵⁸ Facilitating an indigenous church (or churches) that can multiply itself and other churches throughout the Thai culture *is*.

The core issue to setting limits for the geographic extent of a multi-site church is not a matter of distance per se, though distance does have a bearing on discussion the—at least for now.²⁵⁹ The core issue that should determine the extent of multi-site churches is relational proximity. Several sources affirm this position. For example, Ezell says, “We say that if the staff is not in driving distance [the site] is too far

²⁵⁷Surratt, Ligon, and Bird, *The Multi-Site Church Revolution*, 127.

²⁵⁸In 2006, NewSong’s plans were to add additional sites in India, London, and Dallas. Jeffery Weiss, “Ed Young Spreads Fellowship to Florida,” *Dallas Morning News*. 16 September 2006. [on-line]; accessed 19 September 2009; available from http://www.dallasnews.com/cgo-bin/bi/gold_print.cgi; Internet.

²⁵⁹Roebbelen recognizes this reality: “There is prudence and wisdom that might encourage us to be local and regional versus some of the [multi-site] movements that are interstate and international. I get that stuff and I understand the advance of technology, but I question the ability of that approach to have the fellowship and community across large areas.” Peter Roebbelen, telephone interview by the author, 11 September 2009.

away.” White and Hammett make the argument that the greater the distance between sites, the more unhealthy the arrangement becomes. Both of these statements acknowledge the fact that when a single church eclipses its ability to sustain relationships as found within biblical community, the multi-site structure problematic, and thus detrimental to the healthy of the multi-site church.²⁶⁰ Even Dave Browning, one of the most prolific international multi-site leaders, recognizes this issue. In an interview, I asked Browning, “Should there be boundaries placed on the geographic extent of multi-site churches?” He replied, “I don’t think so, but I would say that we can only go as far as relationships can take us.”²⁶¹

In the end, therefore, the geographic boundaries of multi-site church are not established by geography, but instead relational proximity. Determining a benchmark formula for relational proximity boundaries of multi-site would be desirable at this point, but crafting such a tool is difficult at best. There are too many factors involved to create a mechanism of this nature. Even without a tool, however, it is appropriate here to reaffirm the concept of periodic plenary gatherings of a multi-site church at one location for corporate worship services. This activity (and those activities necessary to orchestrate it) would be conducive to limiting relational disconnectedness and affirming the relational singularity of a multi-site church.

While too much distance between sites of a multi-site church does indeed

²⁶⁰Kevin Ezell, telephone interview by the author, 12 September 2010; Thomas White, telephone interview by the author, 16 September 2010; and John Hammett, telephone interview by the author, 17 September 2010.

²⁶¹Dave Browning, telephone interview by the author, 16 September 2010.

cause problems, it seems, as with other matters of ecclesiology, that the geographic boundaries of a multi-site church are a matter for multi-site churches and their leaders to decide together. This question is of utmost importance as multi-site churches seek to live in biblical community with all those who are a part of their church body.

“Is the Multi-Site Church Approach the Next Step for Megachurches?”

Halter and Smay believe that multi-site churches are indeed the next logical step for megachurches. In *AND: The Gathered and Scattered Church*, they write,

The newest evolution of the mega-movement is called “multisite.” Classic mega-churches have grown into large centralized structures; multi-site churches are able to grow even larger with a centralized leadership team. Instead of trying to get everyone under the same roof, church leaders sanction alternative gathering sites while maintaining cohesive vision and teaching through video-venue methods.²⁶²

While Halter and Smay assume too much when elevating “video-venue methods” to a primary component of multi-site church expressions, they insightfully (and correctly) explain the relationship of megachurches to multi-site churches.

This structural decentralization concept evident in the transition from megachurch to multi-site arrangements is not new, nor is it unique to ecclesiological structures. In 2006, Ori Brafman and Rod Beckstrom penned what has become a seminal work on understanding organizational decentralization, *The Starfish and the Spider: The Unstoppable Power of Leaderless Organizations*.²⁶³ Church futurists, theorists, and practitioners alike have cited and expounded upon the “starfish and spider” concept

²⁶²Halter and Smay, *AND: The Gathered and Scattered Church*, 20.

²⁶³Ori Brafman and Rod A. Beckstrom, *The Starfish and the Spider: The Unstoppable Power of Leaderless Organizations* (New York: Portfolio, 2006).

since.²⁶⁴

In the same year that Brafman and Beckstrom introduced their thoughts on decentralization, Ed Stetzer and David Putman identified a noteworthy shift in larger churches and specifically megachurches. It was the movement away from expanding worship space to expanding worship options. The authors explain,

A few years ago churches had multiple services out of necessity. We know that typically when you're seating is at 80 percent capacity you are at your space limit. One solution was to add a service. We can still remember the days, not too long ago, when many churches preferred to build a larger worship space. That is simply not an option or preference today As you examine the emerging megachurches around North America, they are simply not going in this direction. Churches of all sizes are choosing to have multiple services for many reasons. Multiple services allow churches to: 1) maintain intimacy and community even while experiencing rapid growth, 2) provide multiple worship time options, 3) provide services designed for specific people groups or population segments, and 4) continue to free up the high response service times for disconnected people. In short, churches are choosing to offer multiple services for strategic purposes.²⁶⁵

The fusion of decentralization practices and worship options have merged with economic pressures (e.g., cost of land, construction costs, and taxation limitations) to provide a context fertile for the multiplication of multi-site churches and injurious to the long-term outlook of single site megachurches.

Even as Warren Bird postulated on survey results from early Leadership Network studies of multi-site churches (2003), he recognized many early multi-sites were choosing their multi-site strategy because of “a vision to impact through ‘more’ instead

²⁶⁴Two examples of those who have utilized the “Starfish and Spider” theme are (1) Neil Cole (see discussion on church model movement from centralization to decentralization), Cole, *Church 3.0*, 116-36; and (2) Dave and Jon Ferguson (see chap. on “Reproducing Networks”). Ferguson and Ferguson, *Exponential*, 190-94.

²⁶⁵Stetzer and Putman, *Breaking the Missional Code*, 110-11.

of ‘bigger’ [church sites].”²⁶⁶ In the article, Bird goes on to say that many of the churches surveyed were also going multi-site based on “a desire to avoid certain downsides of megachurches” (e.g., challenges related to building costs, zoning regulations, parking constraints, seating limitations, and optimal worship time utilization).²⁶⁷ Seven years later (2010), Larry Osborne recapitulates Bird’s earlier appraisal by averring that multi-site churches “get rid of huge and massive buildings” and thus “solves the megachurch crisis.”²⁶⁸

Perhaps the most telling evidence that multi-sites will replace megachurches is found in Bird and Walters’ recent “Multi-site is Multiplying” (2010) article. One of their primary research conclusions is as follows:

Multi-sites now outnumber megachurches [emphasis original]. There are approximately 1,500 U. S. churches with a worship attendance of two thousand and higher, known as megachurches. But there are now more multi-site churches than that. And the number of multi-site churches is growing faster than the number of megachurches.²⁶⁹

Further evidence of megachurches evolving into multi-site churches can be found in two sources. First, as Thumma and Travis discuss “What Might the Future Hold?” for megachurches in their book *Beyond Megachurch Myths* (2007), they offer the sentiment to follow in a section entitled “Relocations and Franchises”:

²⁶⁶Warren Bird, “The Emerging Multi-Site Movement,” *Explorer*, Leadership Network. Number 71, August 2003, 2 [on-line]; accessed 16 April 2006; available from http://pursuantgroup.com/leadnet/explorer/exp_0803_b.htm; Internet.

²⁶⁷Ibid.

²⁶⁸Larry Osborne, telephone interview by the author, 17 September 2010;

²⁶⁹Bird and Walters, “Multi-site is Multiplying,” 2, 11. Within the article, the paragraph preceding the one cited above the author’s gives further insight: “There are an estimated 3,000 multisite churches in the United States according to the book *Multisite Church Roadtrip*. Leadership Network has a database of almost 1,500 such churches.” Ibid., 2.

We also expect the multisite approach among megachurches to continue as a way both to reach shifting populations and also to maintain the advantages of a large-scale organization. In recent years, we have seen an increase in the number of churches of all sizes willing to create satellite congregations. We have also observed existing churches seeking to become satellite campuses of large, successful megachurches. Rather than joining a megachurch's network, independent congregations may seek to merge with the megachurch to become a franchised subsidiary of the larger church itself.²⁷⁰

Second, *Outreach* magazine's annual report on the largest and fastest growing churches in North America demonstrates that megachurches are moving multi-site. At the time of publication, the 100 largest churches in North America had a total of 384 sites, which is an average of 3.84 sites for each church.²⁷¹ The largest church at 43,500 (Lakewood Church, Houston, Texas) had only one site, and the church reporting the most sites (Brentwood Baptist Church, Brentwood, Tennessee) had 27.²⁷² Perhaps more telling was the fact that the top ten largest churches had 41 sites among them, which shows their combined average site count to be 4.1 sites per church.²⁷³

Interestingly, even as Charles Chaney wrote *Church Planting at the End of the Twentieth Century* (1991), proclaiming, "the age of the megachurch is just dawning in America," his words carried foreshadowing hints of the multi-site church concept to come.²⁷⁴ Observe Chaney's recognition of satellites and the role he perceives they play in expansion of the megachurch concept.

²⁷⁰Thumma and Travis, *Beyond Megachurch Myths*, 186.

²⁷¹"The Largest 100 Churches," *Outreach Magazine*, Special Issue: September 2010, 33.

²⁷²*Ibid.*, 35.

²⁷³*Ibid.* Further, out of all 100 churches cited, 22 churches had only one site, and their average ranking in the top 100 was 57.4 compared to the remaining 78 multi-site churches whose average rank 48.6 (more than 11 places higher).

²⁷⁴Charles L. Chaney, *Church Planting at the End of the Twentieth Century*, rev. ed. (Wheaton: Tyndale House, 1991), 118.

The day that some churches, located in high populations, will have twenty thousand or more in attendance, probably in multiple services, is in our near future. However, research has shown that megachurches, by their nature, create satellites. Megachurches grow and develop by the creation of multiple congregations within their fellowships. They tend to be highly creative and responsive to felt need. They create cell groups and congregations designed to reach and nurture new people in the gospel. This discovery is already bringing balance to prevailing attitudes towards church planting.²⁷⁵

Two decades after Chaney's prediction about the role of satellites and multiple services within the megachurch construct, the multi-site church movement, with a modified satellite structure and multiple venues, is present and growing at a quickening pace. Further, the quasi-satellite structures found in multi-site arrangements are not limited just to megachurches. They are employed by churches that range in size from "the 100s to a few over 20,000."²⁷⁶

Suggested Multiplying Parameters for Multi-Site Churches

Throughout this section various aspects of multi-site church multiplication have been explored. Questions related to the use of multi-site church planting, the benefits of using multi-site expansion over traditional church planting arrangements, and geographic limitations of multi-site churches have been asked and answered. Based on the findings above, two parameters will now be set forth regarding the multiplication of multi-site churches.

Parameter 1: Multi-sites should launch sites *and* plant churches. Churches

²⁷⁵Ibid., 119.

²⁷⁶Bird and Walters explain: "Another important finding documented by this survey is that the average size range of churches doing multi-site is 1,300 including all campuses." Bird and Walters, "Multi-site is Multiplying," 11.

using the multi-site structure have adopted a healthy and beneficial church model, but the multi-site structure alone does not replace or negate the need for church planting. Multi-site efforts at site reproduction or expansion should be commended, but site multiplication alone is insufficient as it is not church planting. Multi-site churches must continually seek to plant churches as they expand their number of sites or venues.

Fortunately, as seen in research findings above, several within the multi-site church movement are committed to both of these multiplication processes. In personal interviews with Greg Ligon and Dave Travis (Leadership Network staff members closely affiliated with the multi-site church movement), both independently indicated that the multi-site churches they work with “are doing both multi-site and church planting.”²⁷⁷

Admittedly, there are those that have chosen and will continue to choose multi-site expansion in place of church planting. Avoidance of church planting, however, is not limited to those who become multi-site. Many churches will never plant another church. Further, given the choice between having churches go multi-site to facilitate growth or remain static or limited by spatial constraints, is it not most wise to advocate ministry multiplication where the gospel is extended to an increasing number of people?²⁷⁸

If the examples cited at the beginning of this chapter (Scott Memorial Baptist Church, San Diego, California; Perimeter Church, Atlanta, Georgia; Mount Paran Church of God, Atlanta, Georgia; New Life Christian Fellowship, Chesapeake, Virginia; and Chartwell Baptist Church, Toronto, Canada) provide insight into the future of multi-site

²⁷⁷Greg Ligon, telephone interview by the author, 21 September 2010; Dave Travis, telephone interview by the author, 16 September 2010.

²⁷⁸Hammett’s conclusions were very helpful to me personally as I processed through this challenge. John Hammett, telephone interview by the author, 17 September 2010.

churches, then what will eventually result from multi-site strategies are strong, independent, and healthy churches. In the end, the dissolution of multi-site structures (even those unplanned) provide a viable means for planting new churches.

In short, what Stetzer and Bird have said is becoming more unavoidable: “the lines between multi-site and church planting are blurring.”²⁷⁹ This understanding is what has led church observers like Bill Easum and Gary McIntosh to conclude that in essence, the distance between church planting and multi-site multiplication is lessening.²⁸⁰ These conclusions lead to the first suggested parameter of multi-site multiplication: multi-site churches should both launch sites and plant churches as they seek to fulfill the Great Commission (Matt 28:19-20).

Parameter 2: Limit multi-site expansion to relational proximity. In the discussion above, the matter of limiting the extent of multi-site geography was explored. Based on that material, it was concluded that geography should not be the sole determinant on how far a multi-site can extend itself. Instead, a better option for providing healthy geographic boundaries was provided: relational proximity. More specifically, multi-site churches should operate only up to the point that healthy biblical relationships can be sustained. While several factors may affect how relationships between campuses, leaders, and the church body are sustained (e.g., video conferencing, distance, transportation), it is of utmost importance that multi-site churches maintain strong relational connectivity between church leaders and the congregation to ensure

²⁷⁹Stetzer and Bird, *Viral Churches*, 137.

²⁸⁰Gary McIntosh, telephone interview by the author, 13 September 2010; Bill Easum, telephone interview by the author, 16 September 2010.

healthy relationships exist between the various sites of a multi-site church.

Conclusion

Throughout this chapter an attempt has been made to introduce and address primary biblical and theological concerns raised concerning the multi-site church concept. Due to the scope of this endeavor and the relative novelty of the multi-site church formulation, this treatment has focused only on key tension points between multi-site and traditional single-site expressions of the Church.

Five areas of the multi-site construct were evaluated, including multi-site (1) organization and polity, (2) congregational fellowship, (3) multiple-site preaching, (4) pastoring/disciplemaking, and (5) multiplication of sites and church plants. Following the outlining of tension points related to applied multi-site structures, a series of suggested parameters were offered to provide guidance for biblically faithful and healthy multi-site expression in both current and future multi-site churches.

Clearly, not every aspect of multi-site ecclesiology has been addressed, but not every aspect of multi-site ecclesiology has been established at this point in history. What has been presented above is an examination of general concerns related to multi-site church expressions and the collective response of the multi-site practitioners and advocates to those concerns. In conclusion, it is appropriate to emulate the words of Robert Banks in his appraisal of *ekklesia*, in that we have been brought to the threshold of understanding multi-site ecclesiology, but we have not yet been carried over it.²⁸¹

²⁸¹Banks, *Paul's Idea of Community*, 46.

CHAPTER 7

CONCLUSION: FINDS, FINAL ASSESSMENT, AND FUTURE STUDIES OF THE MULTI-SITE CHURCH CONCEPT

Introduction

As I write this final chapter, Christmas is three days away. As each year passes, holidays seem to have more significance. They are a time to think back on that which has taken place from year to year. My three sons are now at the age that I was when I first began to remember Christmas. The lights on the Christmas tree, the smells in my family's kitchen, and the greetings of family who visited us all bring back memories that I have treasured.

One of those memories is of my grandpa, Bud McAfee, and his yearly ritual of assembling a 1000 piece jigsaw puzzle. Early in his visits, he spread the puzzles on the table and began the long process of piecing this puzzle together. Grandma, my mother, and her sisters would day-by-day, piece-by-piece complete the mirror image of the puzzle box top. In my six-year-old eyes, this whole process looked completely boring. The puzzle had too many pieces, and the process seemed like it took forever.

Nearly thirty years later, I watch as my six-year-old son goes through the same experience. He is watching his father complete a different kind of jigsaw puzzle. Of course, my jigsaw puzzle focuses not on pictures, but upon ideas, events, and people: it is a dissertation on multi-site churches. It is every bit as boring to him as my grandpa's

creation was to me.

In many ways, the writing of this dissertation is analogous to grandpa's jigsaw puzzles. Throughout the writing process, I have placed and replaced, moved and turned, and pondered over and analyzed hundreds of pieces of the multi-site puzzle. The process has taken much time and energy, but like grandfather's puzzle, it eventually came together to create an excellent picture. Like my grandfather's puzzles, my prayer is that this dissertation has been assembled in such a way that the reader will see an accurate and excellent introduction to the landscape of multi-site churches in North America.

Two aspects of my puzzle assembly, however, have made the process difficult. First, my grandpa had a clear image of what he was piecing together. The multi-site church concept offered no clear box top image from which to work. Thus, introducing a multi-site church concept has been like assembling a 1000 piece jigsaw puzzle without an image to provide guidance. Second, even though images of multi-site churches are available (through videos, white papers, podcasts, and books) for using in creating a portrait of the multi-site movement, because of the fluidity and rapid diffusion of the concept, the multi-site church movement is a moving and elusive target.

In many ways, it is as though the picture of multi-site churches in North America is being refreshed regularly and with each refresh a similar, but different image emerges. In time, it is likely that the landscape of multi-sites in North America, and thus the image, will become more concrete and fixed. Until that time, I trust that this project will provide a suitable introduction to what could be called version 1.0 of the multi-site church movement.

For those watching carefully the footnotes, it will be apparent that over four

years have passed since the first chapter of this dissertation was written. In some ways, this lengthy writing process has been the challenge, especially to family and finances. In other respects, the length of writing time has proven beneficial. Had I completed the dissertation within the first year, many of the citations and resources included within this work would have been missed. Many events, publications, and projects had not yet taken place. Ideas and trends critical to formulating the arguments and validation for multi-site churches were still in incubation only three years ago. Thus, in the end, the elongated writing process of this dissertation has been beneficial and helpful. It is clear in retrospect, that when Lyle Schaller said in 2006, “we are just in the first day of the first week of the multi-site church movement,” he was quite correct.

Within the remainder of this chapter, I will seek to accomplish two goals. First, I will provide my assessment of this work, highlighting both what I perceive to be the strengths and weaknesses of the dissertation. As a part of this assessment, suggestions for future scholarly research on the topic will be given. This assessment will be done on a chapter-by-chapter basis. Second, I will present thirteen calculated predictions for the future of multi-site churches in North America. These predictions will be based on the research found within this dissertation. Within these predictions, implications of how the multi-site church movement will affect the North American church landscape will be addressed when appropriate.

Dissertation Assessment and Research Recommendations

As I began the dissertation, my primary objective was to provide a scholarly introduction to the multi-site church movement in North America. In 2006, *The Multi-*

Site Church Revolution by Surratt, Ligon, and Bird was the first book published on the topic, and thus, it was (and remains) the foundational work on multi-site churches.¹ In many ways, *The Multi-Site Church Revolution*, is an advocacy piece, and it is focused primarily on explaining a multi-site church movement on the popular level. As I approached my research and writing on the topic, I wanted to give attention to the historical developments leading up to the emergence of multi-site churches. As a part of the introduction, I also thought it was important to provide a taxonomy of existing multi-site churches. Finally, I wanted to address key biblical and theological matters, or what we might call tension points, that were raised by those favorable towards and those concerned about the multi-site church concept.

In reality, these three topics were probably too broad to address in one dissertation. At the same time, however, a clear need existed to establish a foundation upon which to build a comprehensive analysis of the multi-site church concept and movement. I could have explored the historical development of multi-site churches, I could have assessed the various types and models of multi-sites, or I could have examined the biblical and theological matters related to multi-site churches, and any one of these topics would have been beneficial and noteworthy projects on multi-site churches. Perhaps they would have been far easier to present and digest as well. If I had pursued one of these courses, however, I would have circumvented the most pressing need, which was to create a scholarly introduction to the topic.

It is appropriate here to offer thanks to Charles E. Lawless, M. David Sills,

¹Geoff Surratt, Greg Ligon, and Warren Bird, *The Multi-Site Church Revolution: Being One Church...in Many Locations* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2006), 18.

J.D. Payne, and Timothy K. Beougher (who served as my third reader while David Sills was on sabbatical). At the defense of my prospectus, my desire was to focus specifically on the historical development of the multi-site phenomenon. The committee wisely and clearly pushed me (at my protest) to expand the focus of the dissertation. I owe special thanks to David Sills for challenging me to address biblical and theological topics more fully. This dissertation is much stronger because I engaged arguments made by those non-supportive of a multi-site church concept.

Once I completed extensive revisions to the prospectus, I began work on the historical development section of the dissertation. What was intended to be one chapter eventually became three. The discussion now turns toward examining each of those chapters.

Chapter 2: Historical Developments in the Multi-Site Church Phenomenon

In my early research on multi-site churches, it was clear that several had made allusion to ministries distributed over an extended area as multi-site church arrangements. Based on readings of Schaller and Towns, I concluded that multi-site churches could not have been in existence until the latter half of the 21st century. I did find, however, several historic church structures that resembled multi-site arrangements.

Within the research on historical development, I was confronted with the challenge of whether I should to try to track as many multi-site church arrangements as I could find or look for key examples of early multi-site ministries. For the sake of summary and clarity, I selected the latter option. In discussing Wesley's model of circuit church arrangements, examples like Seattle's First Presbyterian Church, Highland Park

Baptist Church, among other multi-site type ministries, I provided a panoramic of multi-site-type structures and demonstrated that multi-site concepts are not a completely novel concept.

While the chapter adequately introduced historic multi-site examples, minimal treatment was given to several important multiple site structures due to the limitations of this study. Among them was the Key Church Strategy. This concept deserves more extensive consideration because of the role it appears to have played in the development of multi-site churches. Clearly, Schaller believed that the Key Church concept was a pivotal link between historic satellite church structures and multi-site churches. It would be beneficial to trace the development of the Key Church strategy and the connections and relationships between J. Timothy Ahlen and J. V. Thomas and multi-site leaders and ideology. Though this topic is unexplored in this dissertation, it is interesting that in 1976 and 1977 respectively, Randy Pope was devising his Perimeter Church concept and J. V. Thomas was developing what would become the Key Church strategy with Gambrell Street Baptist Church. It would be beneficial to explore how these individuals developed their models in order to determine if there was a common source or sources contributing to their thought.

Other contributing sources to the multi-site concept are also deserving of consideration in future multi-site research projects. For example, the satellite church concept received passing attention within this study, and yet more research of these historic satellite structures would be helpful. In what may be another vein of multi-site church development, throughout the early part of the twentieth century (circa 1900 through World War II), there appears to have been a “contracting” multi-site church

model in which multiple churches became a single entity (or organism) by merger arrangements of varying degrees.² Investigation into the relationship between current multi-site church expression and church models like the yoked field, federated churches, and multi-parish churches, for example, may yield important insights about how multi-site churches came into being.

The scope of the discussion limited research to multi-site church in North America, but to assume that multi-site churches are merely a product of North American developments would be mistaken. European ministry structures undoubtedly played some role in shaping the North American multi-site movement. It would be beneficial to examine the influence of German Pietism structures, early English Methodism, and Charles Spurgeon's Metropolitan Tabernacle chapel system on the establishment of multi-site churches.

Finally, moving from a historically Western mindset to the Eastern mindset, investigation into the relationship between North America and multi-site churches and churches like Paul Yonggi Cho's Yoido Full Gospel Church (Seoul, South Korea) and Young Nak Presbyterian Church (Seoul, South Korean) would likely yield helpful insights. John Vaughan's book, *The Large Church*, provides an excellent starting point

²See Schaller's discussion on the multi-church parish, federated church, one congregation with two meeting places, and yoked field structures. Lyle E. Schaller, *The Small Church is Different!* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1982), 96-101, 145-52. See also: Harlow S. Mills, *The Making of A Country Parish* (New York: Missionary Education Movement, 1914); Edmund Des. Brunner, *The Larger Parish: A Movement or an Enthusiasm* (New York, NY: Institute of Social and Religious Research, 1934); Arthur Wentworth Hewitt, *God's Back Pasture: A Book of the Rural Parish* (Chicago: Willett, Clark & Company, 1941); James McLeod Carr, *Bright Future: A New Day for the Town and Country Church* (Richmond, VA: John Knox Press, 1956); Marvin T. Judy, *The Cooperative Parish in Nonmetropolitan Areas* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1967); Marvin T. Judy, *The Parish Development Process* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1973); and Marshall E. Schirer and Mary Anne Forehand, *Cooperative Ministry: Hope for Small Churches* (Valley Forge, PA: Judson Press, 1984).

for studying historic satellite church concepts in the Eastern and Western hemispheres.³

Chapter 3: Catalytic Factors to the Emergence of the Multi-Site Church

The impetus of the third chapter came from assertions by church researchers that the multi-site concept and ideology emerged, in large part, because of the influence of cultural and environmental phenomena. Towns was among the first to introduce this thinking.⁴ The challenge with Towns' claims specifically was that he provided limited explanation and even less validation. While Schaller would later provide clarification to this understanding in *Discontinuity and Hope* by explaining more thoroughly how technology, mobility, and economics contributed to the development of multi-site churches, his contribution was still limited.⁵ Typical of Schaller's writing style, he wrote more theoretically and based his conclusions on only a few examples.

As I explored the relationship between these three societal advancements identified by Schaller and the emergence of the multi-site concept, I assumed that they were strongly influential on the development of multi-site churches. The more I researched, the clearer this relationship became. Interestingly, what proved to be most beneficial in helping me to understand the relationship between these societal factors and the multi-site were two works unrelated to the multi-site concept. Malcolm Gladwell's *Tipping Point* and Thomas Friedman's *The World Is Flat* led me to think more

³John Vaughan, *The Large Church: A Twentieth-Century Expression of the First-Century Church* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1985), 100-06.

⁴Elmer Towns, *10 of Today's Most Innovative Churches* (Ventura, CA: Regal, 1990), 237-38.

⁵Lyle E. Schaller, *Discontinuity and Hope: Radical Change and the Path of the Future* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1999).

holistically about matters of globalization, technology, and innovation, and how they affect humanity, and thus the landscape of church structure within Christianity.⁶ The more I learned about the impact of World War II and the changes that ensued in the social and church constructs of the postwar era, the more I began to see how the cultural environment provided a fertile soil for the emergence of megachurches and then ultimately the genesis of multi-site churches.

In my estimation, the issues of accelerated mobility, technological advancement, and economic strengthening converged to provide a suitable beachhead for the multi-site church movement. As with any social phenomenon, however, a multiplicity of factors generally brings about significant social change. The multi-site church phenomenon is no exception. While I addressed macro-issues involved in the dawn of the multi-site church, there are micro-issues (what may be considered subset issues) of the three I provided. For example, related to technology, minimal treatment was given to the Internet, computers, and television. Even less discussion was allocated to discussing satellite technologies, telecommunications, fiber optics, audiovisual advancements, voice replication, digital technologies, and the declining costs related to each of these technologies. Much work remains undone on how secondary factors contributed to the development of multi-site churches.

Another area left untreated was the role megachurches played in the development of multi-site churches. Towns' work touches upon this concept only briefly

⁶Malcolm Gladwell, *The Tipping Point* (New York: Little, Brown, and Co., 2000); Thomas L. Friedman, *The World Is Flat: A Brief History of the Twenty-First Century* (New York: Picador, 2007).

in *10 of Today's Most Innovative Churches*, and two decades have transpired since its publication. Building upon the work of John Vaughan, Lyle Schaller, and Elmer Towns together, one could produce a dissertation on the relationship between megachurches and multi-site churches.

Chapter 4: The Emergence of Multi-Site Churches

In terms of the historical development of the multi-site phenomenon, perhaps the most intriguing moment came when, in 1980, Randy Pope took Perimeter Church multi-site with the addition of their second campus. Chapter 4 highlights key facets of the Perimeter Church experience, but much more work could have been done (and should be in the future) on the links and connections between Perimeter Church and the multi-site church movement.

While some, like Peter Roebbelen, contend that the multi-site phenomenon began randomly with several different individuals arriving at the same innovation simultaneously (for Roebbelen it came in 1993),⁷ it seems unlikely that what Pope discovered in 1980 and what became more widely recognized in the 1990s as the multi-site concept were disparate phenomena. Further research will likely demonstrate that several innovators and early adopters embraced Pope's model (whether or not they acknowledged Pope as the source) and contextualized the basics of his Perimeter Church model to begin early multi-site experiments. It may be that Elmer Towns was the primary conduit by which early multi-site explorers began to implement the multi-site

⁷Peter Roebbelen, telephone interview by author, 11 September 2009.

structure or what Towns labels “Extended Geographic Parish Church.”⁸

Tom Cheyney contends that Towns was already discussing the extended geographic parish church in 1984, which would be only four years after Pope went multi-site (1980) and six years before Towns introduced Pope’s model through *10 of Today’s Most Innovative Churches* (1990).⁹ If Cheyney’s timing is accurate, it is probable that Towns was the prime disseminator of the multi-site church concept via his writings on Perimeter Church. Schaller then, while most responsible for proliferating the multi-site nomenclature through his writings, should be considered the secondary herald of the multi-site church movement, as his published identification of multi-site concept came after Towns’ initial discoveries.

To bring deeper understanding into the origin and early development of multi-site churches, additional investigation should be conducted on the era between 1980 and September 11, 2001, when the Leadership Network (initiated by Dave Travis and Greg Ligon) hosted the multi-site/multi-campus gathering in Chicago, Illinois. The more that is understood about early multi-site church formulations, the more likely present day multi-site practitioners, observers, critics, and theorists will understand and assess the nature, benefits, and dangers of multi-site strategies and structures.

Another possible direction for research that may prove increasingly valuable as the multi-site movement progresses is the analysis on individuals who were (are) instrumental to the conceptualization, development, and advancement of multi-site churches. Three individuals in particular have significantly shaped the landscape of

⁸Towns, *10 of Today’s Most Innovative Churches*.

⁹Ibid.

multi-site churches in North America: Lyle Schaller, Elmer Towns, and Carl F. George. The writing and teachings of this triad laid the groundwork for the multi-site church movement, and without their work, it is unlikely that the multi-site church movement would have flourished as successfully as it has. This reality is especially true of Carl F. George due to the influence of the meta-church model on earlier multi-site innovators like Dave Ferguson of Community Christian Church, Naperville, Illinois.¹⁰

Finally, it would be difficult to understate the importance of the Leadership Network in their influence on the initiation and acceleration of the multi-site church movement. Following the 2001 multi-site gathering, the Leadership Network invested heavily in multi-site innovations, strategies, and influencers. As a result, the Leadership Network is in many respects the hub of multi-site development and learning. An analysis of the Leadership Network's influence on the Church in North America would yield numerous benefits for understanding the present and future directions of large and innovative churches in the United States.

Of particular importance in this area are investigations into Peter Drucker's influence upon Bob Buford and in turn the influence of the Leadership Network on megachurch and multi-site church development.¹¹ Further, an examination of Warren

¹⁰See John Vaughan's critiques Carl George's "metachurch" categorization and the origination of the term. John N. Vaughan, *Megachurches & America's Cities: How Churches Grow* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1993), 34-38.

¹¹Vaughan astutely recognizes Drucker's influence on large and innovative churches in the United States. *Ibid.*, 38-40. It is worth noting that Buford is both the founder of Leadership Network and founding chairman of the Peter F. Drucker Foundation for Nonprofit Management. Bob Buford, "How Boomers, Churches, and Entrepreneurs Can Transform Society," *The Community of the Future*, ed. Frances Hesselbein, Marshall Goldsmith, Richard Beckhard, and Richard F. Schubert (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1998), 35.

The connection between Drucker, Buford, and the multi-site movement is visible in Buford's description of "Next Church" or the church of the future. This quote displays simultaneously a foundational example of Druckerian ideology and core values of the multi-site church movement:

Bird's writings related to multi-site churches and megachurches would prove helpful to understanding the diffusion of megachurch and multi-site church innovation.

If Schaller and Towns were responsible for chronicling the early development of multi-site churches, Warren Bird is their contemporary counterpart. Bird is the scribe and authority on the multi-site church movement, and better than any other individual (or collection of individuals perhaps), he owns the most holistic perspective on multi-site churches and the multi-site church movement. As such, understanding his theology, predispositions, biases, and motivations will prove enlightening as to how he projects and influences the future direction of multi-site churches and the multi-site movement.

In summation, as intended this fourth chapter provided a holistic picture of the multi-site church movement between 1980 and the present era. Much more material could have been included within this chapter, but due to spatial constraints and the nature of this inquiry, the discussion concluded appropriately in achieving the desired purpose.

Chapter 5: Definition and Categorization of Multi-Site Church Models

Early in the research, I realized that there was a variety of multi-site church expressions. Because I struggled with understanding the differences between multi-site churches formulations, I deemed that it was critical to present a multisite church taxonomy in order to frame the multisite church discussion in a clear and understandable way. Based on the finished product, I believe this chapter is one of the strongest of the dissertation.

“Churches have always been an important part of the American community. But the Next Church is redefining the natures and role of community itself by excelling five basic practices: an emphasis on leadership and leadership development, peer learning networks, cultural relevance, and emphasis on meeting individual needs within the context of community, and mobilization of the laity.” Ibid., 42.

In constructing the taxonomy, I surveyed available multi-site church models and classifications in publication. After presenting each classification at the beginning of the chapter, I established the groundwork for taxonomy inclusive of extant multi-site models or categories, noting commonalities and differences among them.

One of the primary objectives for creating the classification structure was to provide an entry point to multi-site church classification. Care was taken while constructing the grid to create it in such a way that it could be framed out further by others in future multi-site church research.

Two factors contributed to this open-ended, taxonomy approach. First, it is clear that multi-site churches are still developing and changing. Thus, a closed classification system would prove self-limiting, and it would be incomplete. Second, as has been the case with open source computer programming (e.g. Apache, Moodle, Joomla, Mozilla Firefox, etc.) it is clear that if a concept is left open for engagement, correction, and strengthening, it remains possible for others to contribute to the taxonomy, making the final product more robust and complete.

In the future, I am hopeful that others will engage the taxonomy and continue to refine it. As the multi-site movement solidifies, other aspects of multi-site structures should become more discernable, and thus, more easily classified. For example, the issue of church polity in multi-site churches remains in an incubation period, but could be added into the taxonomy later once the issue of polity is more stabilized.

In many respects, the content of the chapter is simple. Within it, basic definitions were provided for each category, and model types were validated with several examples. The chapter could be enhanced with more examples included with each

classification, but again, space constraints required limitation here. Nevertheless, adequate examples were available to provide validation for each definition, and additional examples would simply grant the reader more sources for further inquiry.

Chapter 6: Biblical and Theological Boundaries for Developing Healthy Churches, with Application to Multi-Site Church Models

In my prospectus defense as noted above, I originally planned a more minimalistic treatment of the biblical and theological matters of the multi-site church concept. My thinking was that it would be more important to frame and define what the multi-site church concept looked like, where it came from, and how it should be understood as a social and cultural phenomenon. Wisely, my committee pushed me toward a fuller engagement of the biblical theological tension points related to multi-site churches.

Frankly, as I began my research process, I had had many questions about the validity of multi-site churches and how they could function properly within the framework of Scripture. Because my committee pressed me to investigate these issues carefully, I conclude this dissertation with my reservations and doubts about multi-site church assuaged. Further, I now consider myself an advocate of the multi-site church concept.

Undoubtedly, the chapter has weaknesses. It is very broad. It addresses only a limited number of tension points, and it merely scratches the surface of multi-site church ecclesiology. At the same time, in being consistent with the purpose of this dissertation, the chapter provides a fitting entry point into more detailed and exhaustive study into

multi-site ecclesiology.¹² Thus, the goal of the dissertation regarding biblical and theological discussion has been accomplished.

In terms of further research, each of the tension points addressed within chapter 6 provides the foundation for stand-alone detailed research projects. For example, one could complete a doctoral dissertation on the polity of multi-site churches; however, it will likely be some time before that work can be suitably comprehensive. One could also explore multi-site ecclesiology as it relates to New Testament expressions of the early church.

I did critique (and strongly at times) those arguing that a multi-site equals multiple churches (e.g., Gaines and Leeman). Much of my concern was rooted in the tone of their writing and their insufficient experience and study of multi-site churches. Notwithstanding, those in the “anti-multi-site” camp do wisely raise concerns about multi-site churches. Indeed, Dever, Leeman, Gilbert, and others should be commended for their diligence in seeking to provide healthy boundaries for multiple and single site churches alike.

As I relayed to Jonathan Lehmann following my interview of him, it would be beneficial for individuals within the 9Marks tribe to consider a joint publication with Leadership Network that would delve more fully into the ecclesiology of multi-site churches. An edited work with contributors such as Jonathan Lehmann, Mark Dever, Gregg Allison, J.D. Greear, John Piper, Warren Bird, Dave Travis, Dave Ferguson, Geoff Surratt, Larry Osborne, Dave Browning, Mark Driscoll, and John Hammett would, in my

¹²See R. Scott Reavely, “An Ecclesiology for Multi-site Churches: Thinking Biblically about the Local Church in Multiple Locations” (D.Min. diss., Western Seminary, 2007), for a basic introduction to multi-site ecclesiology.

estimation, prove engaging, informative, and marketable. Such a work addressing multi-site churches from a wide range of perspectives and approaches would be immensely beneficial to those considering the theological implications of embracing multi-site strategies and structures. Moreover, such a project would greatly advance the discussion on developing healthy expressions of multi-site churches.

One specific matter in the biblical and theological chapter needs treatment more urgently: pastoral care or shepherding within the multi-site church context. While I argued that pastoral care can take place effectively in multi-site churches, and perhaps more effectively in multi-site churches than in single-site churches, development of healthy pastoral care structures still need further exploration. This area will likely be a long-term nemesis of multi-site churches.

Predictions Regarding the Multi-site Church Movement in North America

Having examined the multi-site church concept in detail, I will now offer 13 predictions or forecasts as to the future direction of the multi-site church movement in North America. In the process, I will highlight implications of what these predictions would mean for multi-site and single site churches in the future.

Prediction Number 1: Megachurches Will Increasingly Transition into Multi-Site Churches

Based on the research of Bird and Walters, it is clear that multi-sites now outnumber megachurches in North America.¹³ While multi-sites may not be the only

¹³Warren Bird and Kristin Walters, “Multisite is Multiplying: Survey Identifies Leaders Practices and Confirms New Developments in the Movement’s Expansion,” Leadership Network (Dallas), (September 2, 2010): 2-3.

direction for megachurches, an increasing number of megachurches will move to the multiple site arrangement in order to deal with impending challenges facing megachurches (e.g., increased taxation, increased property costs, and lower giving rates). Increasingly, the multi-site arrangement will become the preferred remedy for megachurch problems related to being land-locked, resource crunched, and plateaued.

This movement toward multi-site structures by megachurches will likely diffuse to smaller churches that often embrace megachurch innovations. In the process, what could be a system-wide shift toward multi-site approaches may strengthen the financial health of churches as they turn away from investing in larger and expansive properties and buildings to focus on the reproduction of smaller and more numerous sites or campuses. J.D. Greear recognizes this potential as he argues that the multi-site arrangement could help curtail the extensive expenditures the North American church has been investing in church buildings.¹⁴

Prediction Number 2: The Multi-Siting Process Will Become the First Step in Church Planting Strategies

The question over whether multi-siting will replace church planting was dealt with in the previous chapter. Within that discussion, it was made clear that multi-site and church planting processes are not mutually exclusive growth strategies. Instead, both of these multiplication approaches can function in a symbiotic (mutually beneficial) relationship.

¹⁴J. D. Greear, "A Pastor Defends His Multi-Site Church," *9Marks eJournal* 6, no. 3 (2009): 22-23.

As the multi-site movement continues to evolve and develop, it is likely that more churches will realize that multi-site approaches are both effective and efficient strategies for multiplying congregations and new churches.¹⁵ Ultimately, the goal of each church should be to multiply believers and to multiply congregations. The multi-site church arrangement allows for both of these activities to take place, and it simultaneously prepares a church for the eventual multiplication of additional churches through church planting practices.

The multi-site process affords the opportunity for smaller and traditional congregations to transition gradually into church planting with lower levels of financial costs, time commitment, and personal risk. Because of these benefits, it is likely that more churches will begin to plant churches in the coming decades, and many will practice church planting by initiating the launch of new venues or sites first. Based on their successes of beginning new ministry ventures, those churches will be poised to launch new churches more effectively.

**Prediction Number 3: The
Multi-Site Church Process Will
Create More (Not Fewer) Churches**

At the beginning of chapter 6, the growth and decline of several early multi-site churches was highlighted. In each case, it was shown that early multi-sites eventually transitioned away from true multi-site structures to some other type of loosely connected church network or partnership. If these churches provide a general example of how multi-site churches develop and grow, then as multi-site churches move further

¹⁵Ibid., 23-25.

through their lifecycles, they demonstrate an increasing propensity to fragment or spin off into independent churches. In this way, the multi-site church arrangement provides a “win/win” situation. If a multi-site church and its campuses remain as a singular entity, the church will likely create additional campuses or continue to plant other sites and even churches. If the multi-site church elects to make its campuses independent churches at some point (as was the case with Perimeter Church, Atlanta, Georgia, Chartwell Bible Church, Toronto, Ontario, and New Life Christian Fellowship, Virginia Beach, Virginia), the result is more churches.

Even if multi-site churches do not follow the historic path of multi-site fragmentation but remain committed to church multiplication, the generation of new churches will ensue. Bird concluded from his research that churches that engaged in the creation of new sites ultimately became more committed to planting new churches.¹⁶

Prediction Number 4: Multi-Site Churches Will Bring Healthy Balance to Clergy and Laity Roles within Churches

The elevation of professional clergy across the American church landscape has been problematic at best. When surveying the New Testament, one finds little support for the presence of a paid church staff executing the ministry functions of a congregation as a sole vocation. What is evident from the Scriptures and in principle and practice today is that the most biblically validated and healthy expressions of church leadership are those in which supported church leaders (clergy) and leaders from within the body

¹⁶Warren Bird, “Downsizing Multisite—and Other Discoveries,” *Outreach*, The 2010 Outreach 100, n.d., 109.

(laity) work closely together in establishing the direction and administration of local congregations.

The multi-site church arrangement, by nature and by necessity, demands an increased healthy balance in the participation and leadership of clergy and laity in starting, maintaining, and planting additional church sites and church plants. As multi-site churches continue to increase in size and number, they require an ever-expanding base of lay leaders to support church expansion and congregational health. As a result, multi-site churches will continue to demonstrate a more committed church constituency, a stronger leadership-based laity, a more defined leadership development system, and a more multiplication-minded church body than will single-site churches. For these reasons, the multi-site arrangement will result in a movement toward a more healthy balance between clergy and laity leadership roles.

**Prediction Number 5: Multi-Site
Church Strategies Will Replace
Parachurch College and University
Campus Ministries**

As economic pressures increase for churches throughout the United States, organizations like Campus Crusade for Christ, InterVarsity, and Baptist Collegiate Ministries will see diminished support and resourcing opportunities from local churches and denominations. As a result, innovative multi-site church leaders and congregations, because of the priority of college and university students in reaching future generations, will begin to extend church sites near or onto college campuses. Eventually, traditional collegiate ministers funded by denominational agencies or support raising structures will be eclipsed by multi-site pastors who launch sites of healthy multiplying churches into

collegiate environs. These college campus multi-sites will proliferate because of their cost effectiveness, their ease of launching quickly, and their ability to multiply rapidly.

Prediction Number 6: Multi-Site Churches Will Simultaneously become Larger and Smaller

In my interview with Dave Browning, I was introduced to the term “well curve,” which is the opposite or the antitheses of the “bell (sigmoid) curve” structure. Browning argues that multi-site churches will continue to grow in the total number of people involved within them, but Browning avers that as multi-site churches grow larger in number, their gatherings (sites) will become smaller.¹⁷ This shift toward smaller gatherings is to accommodate the perceived desire of churchgoers to experience more connectivity and corporate intimacy within worship settings. Applying Browning’s thinking more holistically to the more North American landscape, as multi-site churches become more numerous, they will continue to grow in size and, simultaneously, an increasing number of smaller multi-site gatherings (venues and sites) will become progressively more visible.¹⁸

¹⁷Browning’s argument is explained thoroughly in his book *Hybrid Church*. Dave Browning, *The Hybrid Church: The Fusion of Intimacy and Impact* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2010); Cf. Halter and Smay’s discussion on this issue. Hugh Halter and Matt Smay, *AND: The Gathered and Scattered Church* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2010).

¹⁸Jim Tomberlin, “2011 MultiSite Trends,” MultiSite Solutions, 1 [on-line]; Accessed 17 January 2001; available from http://campaign.r20.constantcontact.com/render?llr=qvbcxkcab&v=001PEzLWYs7INI1TM7vP_fyk4EkL2HXGQVXaaU5E15UfcX7t4C8yJqX7i5JOvAKdj4yxEysUi769VqQwVO3wytFteKhUEL0OIUJ_cYmC5h2oUyWIZJe11V0fNqCaEq7SzfbeCFwHTG2DetTk5fggNAVGM7YD9ayyJS; Internet; Jim Tomberlin, “Multi-site Church Trend Spotting for 2009,” Third Quarter Consulting [on-line]; accessed 2 February 2010; available from <http://jimtomberlin.com/resources.html>; Internet.

Prediction Number 7: Plateaued and Declining Churches Will Merge with Multi-Site Churches at an Increasing Rate

In *Innovations In Ministry*, Schaller asked the question, “What shall we do with the wounded birds” or those churches that because of congregational health problems can no longer sustain themselves or remain viable?¹⁹ In many ways, the multi-site church arrangement provides remedy for “wounded bird” churches. While White calls the practice of a multi-site adopting a “wounded bird” cannibalization,²⁰ the process of healthy churches adopting a plateaued or declining church is the best scenario for “wounded bird” congregations, save spiritual awakening or revival of that congregation.

While adopting a stagnant congregation into a multi-site church would prevent the unhealthy church from growing again on its own, the reality is that many churches that reach the state of plateau or decline do not often recover from it. Thus, if the death or continual decline of a congregation appears imminent, it would appear to be the most prudent course of action spiritually, fiscally, relationally, and evangelistically to bring “wounded bird” churches into full partnership as a campus of a multi-site church.²¹

¹⁹Lyle E. Schaller, *Innovations in Ministry: Models for the 21st Century* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1994), 98-110.

²⁰Thomas White, “Nine Reasons I Don’t Like Multi-site Churches, from A Guy Who Should,” *9 Marks eJournal* 6, no. 3 (2009): 42.

²¹Consider Jim Tomberlin’s analysis of what he calls the multi-site “revitalization” strategy. According to Tomberlin, “The multisite movement began as a band-aid for megachurches that were out of room or limited by zoning restrictions. It quickly evolved into a growth strategy for healthy churches of all sizes and will become a *revitalization* [emphasis original] strategy for stuck or struggling churches. Many of these aging churches are solid, but stuck in non-growing situations because of the inevitable social-demographic changes occurring around them and/or their inability to embrace contemporary worship styles and culturally-relevant ministry practices. Multisiting [*sic*] allows stuck churches to reinvent themselves by extending in new ways and to new locations without abandoning their base. Revitalization mergers also allow smaller struggling churches to have a new beginning by being adopted by a stronger vibrant church.

In terms of spiritual benefit, plateaued and declining churches often spend much of their time dealing with challenges and conflicts related to maintenance and closure prevention. By bringing a “wounded bird” into a multi-site arrangement, these tension points and pressures are alleviated. Congregants are given a vision and purpose to work towards once they ratify joining the multi-site congregation.

In terms of fiscal benefit, in order to have created the “wounded bird” church initially, investments generally had to have been made in property purchase and physical plant construction. If the congregation decides to dissolve, the assets of the church would be redistributed through denominational channels, and possibly reallocated to ministries outside the ministry context of the “wounded bird” congregation. If the “wounded bird” church determines to maintain until the last member, many of the resources of the church would be spent simply to maintain the presence of an unhealthy church. Should that “wounded bird” join with a multi-site congregation, the resources and assets of the “wounded bird” can be invested in proven kingdom expansion work in the area to which the church initially targeted for mission and ministry.

In terms of evangelism, it seems highly improbable that a “wounded bird” church would be evangelistic or especially effective in evangelism efforts. Because “wounded birds” are often engaged in unhealthy congregation patterns (e.g., conflict, strife, powerbrokers), the Christian witness both within the congregation and into the community around the church is rarely positive. In reality, the overall witness of “wounded bird” congregations is not a compelling introduction to or proclamation of the gospel. It is more often a deterrent from it. In the end, it would be far more beneficial

This revitalization will be the impetus in the surge of church mergers that is growing across the church landscape.” Tomberlin, “2011 MultiSite Trends,” 1.

for these “wounded birds” to join growing congregations where the evangelistic focus is properly understood and the evangelistic appeal is regularly expressed.

As Schaller’s “wounded birds” grow in number over the coming decades, more churches that are multi-site will have the opportunity to embrace wounded congregations and reorient them toward healthy inclusion within their multi-site structures. The result will be a widespread adoption of declining congregations, church properties, and facilities by multi-site churches.²²

Prediction Number 8: Multi-Site Churches and Their Networks Will Replace Denominations

Examples of this trend abound. Wayne Cordeiro and his network of New Hope Church campuses and church plants began in Hawaii and now encircle the rim of the Pacific Ocean. Mark Driscoll, pastor of Mars Hills Church, Seattle, Washington, and the Acts 29 network, provides another cogent example of a church launching a network that replaces the role of a denomination. Other examples include (1) Dave Browning of Christ the King International, Mount Vernon, Washington; (2) Dave Ferguson of Community Christian Church, Naperville, Illinois, and their New Thing Church network; (3) Craig Groeschel and LifeChurch.tv, Edmond, Oklahoma; and (4) Andy Stanley of North Point Community Church, Alpharetta, Georgia, and North Point’s strategic partners network. These church network ventures all provide clear examples of strong churches developing networks of sites and churches in order to create church

²²Jim Tomberlin, “Multi-sightings: The Boom in Multiple Venues,” *REV!*, March/April 2008, 68; Tomberlin, “Multi-site Church Trend Spotting for 2009.”

multiplication and planting movements.²³

In a time where almost all denominations have plateaued and are presently in a state of contraction and decline, large multi-sites are expanding, some are growing networks, and those networks are expanding rapidly. In the future, multi-site churches and the movements they create through networks (large and small) will succeed denominations as connecting bodies of like-minded congregations.²⁴

Prediction Number 9: Onsite Leadership Development and Theological Training Will Eclipse Traditional, Seminary-Based Ministry Training for Multi-Site Churches

Multi-site churches generally look within their congregation for ministry leaders and campus pastors. The ideal arrangement for multi-site church leaders is to begin new sites and venues under the leadership of a church member whom they have nurtured within their congregation. By elevating them incrementally through leadership of a small group, then small groups, then extended leadership over an existing campus, the multi-site church leaders and staff cultivate and train future campus pastors and church planters within their church body in a hands-on laboratory.

The notion of sending a potential pastor candidate away from a multi-site

²³Heather Johnson and Lindy Lowry, “25 Ideas and Trends Reshaping the American Church,” *Outreach*, January/February 2009, 58.

²⁴Cf. Tomberlin’s analysis: “More congregations will become proactive in church planting as they experience the benefit of reproduction through their multisite efforts. Increasingly, denominations are looking to local churches to lead the way in church planting instead of the other way around. This is a significant shift of initiative. Multicampus churches have driven the explosion of church-planting networks of the last few years: Seacoast Church and the Association of Related Churches; Mars Hill and Acts 29; Community Christian Church and NewThing Network; among others.” Jim Tomberlin, “2010 Multisite Forecast,” *Outreach*, 7 January 2010 [on-line]; accessed 22 May 2010; available from <http://www.outreachmagazine.com/features/3368-2010-Multisite-Forecast.html?print.>, Internet.

congregation to attend a Bible college or seminary for three to four years to prepare those individuals for ministry is increasingly viewed as impractical, costly, and ineffective. In a time when educational delivery systems are moving to online formats and ministry training programs and tools are becoming more readily available,²⁵ the traditional seminary-based education is becoming less appealing and necessary for the health, growth, and development of local churches. In light of these considerations, the locus of theological training will shift increasingly away from seminaries and toward local churches.

Some may protest this conclusion, arguing that seminary education is essential for ensuring the development and continuation of healthy churches across the church landscape of North America. It is difficult to escape the reality, however, that many North America churches now at plateau or in decline employ pastors trained within theological institutions. If a positive correlation exists between the growth of healthy churches and seminary education, it would be difficult to argue that current seminary education (specifically in terms of content and delivery) is not beneficial to American congregational life. The opposite seems to be true.

Recognizing this trend, multi-site churches will choose increasingly to keep potential campus pastors and staff members within their churches for theological training, leadership development, and DNA imprinting. Further, it is likely that multi-site churches will choose to use collaborative-based theological education analogous to continuing education requirements within secular training fields. If seminaries intend to train and prepare multi-site church leaders of the future, they would be wise to adopt

²⁵Johnson and Lowry, “25 Ideas and Trends Reshaping the American Church,” 59.

educational structures, methodologies, and delivery systems that acquiesce to the needs of multi-site churches rather than requiring multi-site leaders to acquiesce to external institutions. If seminaries do not make necessary adjustments, they will likely suffer increasing contraction.

Prediction Number 10: Multi-Site Churches Will Become Increasingly Multicultural

The work of several multi-site churches demonstrates that multi-site strategies provide a mechanism by which a single church can evangelize and congregationalize a variety of ethnicities.²⁶ New Life Church of Chicago, Illinois; Church of the Highlands Birmingham, Alabama; and Healing Place Church, Baton Rouge, Louisiana; all provide pertinent examples of multi-site churches that are reaching beyond a single ethnicity into multiple cultures with additional church sites.

New Life Church of Chicago, for example, functions as a cross-cultural multi-site offering as many worship experiences held in Spanish as the do in English. While some may argue that the ideal expression of church merges multiple ethnicities to multicultural worship gatherings, ethnic specific campus sites allow ethnically monolithic congregations to reach effectively beyond their cultural biases and preconceptions to engage new ethnic populations.²⁷

Even if multiethnic multi-site churches have a limited or shortened lifecycle and the ethnic groups of a single multi-site church fragment over time, the multi-site

²⁶Bird, “Downsizing Multisite—and Other Discoveries,” 109.

²⁷For a more in depth treatment of this subject, see: Mark DeYmaz and Harry Li, *Ethnic Lens: Mixing Diversity into Your Local Church* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2010); and Mark DeYmaz, *Building*

strategy still provides a solution for cross-cultural church planting that otherwise would not exist. As more of the early adopters within the multi-site movement embrace and refine this cross-culture multi-siting concept, an increasing number of churches will become multi-cultural by launching sites to reach specific demographic niches emerging around the United States.²⁸

**Prediction Number 11: Internet
Campuses of Multi-Site Churches Will
Proliferate as Social and Video
Communication Technologies Improve**

Whether or not individuals deem church over the Internet as theologically acceptable, the concept will flourish in the coming years. In a world where geography is becoming less of a barrier for relationship and communication, human activities will be channeled increasingly through Internet technology. With the advent of technologies such as Facebook, Twitter, Skype, Rockmelt, video calling, and their rapid spread and implementation in American social systems, technology-based communication will become increasingly normalized.

While it may seem like a pipe dream presently for church small groups to gather via holographic imaging in a room of someone's house, many perceived impossibilities of the past are now common fixtures within our society (e.g., telephones,

a Healthy Multi-ethnic Church: Mandate, Commitments and Practices of a Diverse Congregation (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2007).

²⁸Tomberlin, "Multi-sightings: The Boom in Multiple Venues," 8. Consider Bird's findings: "A common myth held about multisite churches is that they are a mostly 'white' phenomenon. But in this survey, we found that 15 percent of the responding churches are not predominately white. Most of those describe themselves as multiethnic (no single group comprises 80 percent or more of the church's population). Some churches are also using multisite to reach out to people who speak other languages. Nearly a quarter of the churches we surveyed are now offering worship services in languages other than the one spoken at the original campus." Bird, "Downsizing Multisite—and Other Discoveries," 109.

automobiles, flight, and personal computers). When one considers the explosion of the Internet between when it went public in 1995 and today, it does not seem so far-fetched that a new technology could radically alter the way people do church. Further, if Christianity became less acceptable or outlawed within society, Internet churches would spread even more rapidly. An onset of petroleum shortages or other energy limitations could also induce multiplication of Internet-based church services and activities.

As Internet technologies provide more methods to reach people with the gospel and biblical community continues to extend beyond geographic limitations, arguments against Internet churches will be mitigated. Undoubtedly, opponents to the Internet church concepts will revile this idea on the grounds that it will cause disconnect between participants and quash biblical community. If Internet churches, however, provide more conduits and interaction points than non-Internet churches, then the argument against Internet churches due to lack of relational connectivity becomes tentative. While Internet churches do cause challenges, and thus, theological examination is necessary to understand them and their biblical and theological implications, it is unlikely that many issues will stifle the growth and spread of Internet campuses of multi-site churches.²⁹

Prediction Number 12: Multi-Site Practices and Approaches Will Be Refined Quickly and Proliferate Rapidly

Since the first gathering of multi-site church innovators in 2001, the multi-site church concept has grown rapidly. Throughout this growth process, multi-site forms and expressions have undergone metamorphosis, and styles and approaches of multi-site

²⁹Tomberlin, “2011 MultiSite Trends,” 2; Tomberlin, “Multi-site Church Trend Spottings for 2009.” See also Tomberlin, “2010 Multisite Forecast,” 3.

structure have undergone continual refining. As the multi-site concept continues to germinate and expand beyond early adopters, multi-site structures will be refined and enhanced as new groups begin to incorporate the multi-site strategy into their ministry framework.³⁰ While it would be difficult to predict the number of churches who will embrace multi-site strategies over the next few decades, if the multi-site trend follows historic patterns of innovation implementation (e.g., television screens in worship services, adoption of website technologies, sound amplification during worship, fan patterns of sanctuary construction, construction of on-site educational space, seeker sensitive approaches, and purpose driven strategies), multi-site churches will become a commonplace church arrangement within North America.

Prediction Number 13: More National and International Multi-Sites Will Emerge Creating Multi-Site Churches with Sites in the Double and Triple Digits

In my interview with Peter Roebbelen, I was also introduced to the idea of national churches, that is, a single church spread across a nation, and in some cases several nations, with locations numbering in the double and possibly triple digits.³¹ At first, it did not seem that such churches arrangements were possible. Two realities, however, demonstrated that national and international multi-site churches are not only a possible, but present and growing in number.

The first reality is that super churches spanning across nations have long been

³⁰Tomberlin, “Multi-sightings: The Boom in Multiple Venues,” 66.

³¹Peter Roebbelen, telephone interview by author, 11 September 2009. See Tomberlin’s comments on double-digit multi-sites. Tomberlin, “Multi-site Church Trend Spotting for 2009.”

in existence outside of the United States. In his book *The Large Church*, John Vaughn highlights Jotabeche Methodist Pentecostal Church (Santiago, Chile), Yoido Full Gospel Church (Seoul, South Korea), and Young Nak Presbyterian Church (Seoul, South Korea) as examples of churches that extended across regional and even national borders with thousands of members distributed over multiple locations.³² Currently, Warren Bird identifies forty of the world's largest churches as being multi-site.³³

The second reality is that several of the larger multi-site churches in North America have already begun to embrace the status of national and international multi-site churches. New Hope Church (Oahu, Hawaii), LifeChurch.tv (Edmond, Oklahoma), Northland: A Church Distributed (Longwood, Florida), and Christ the King Church International (Mount Vernon, Washington) are a few examples of churches already functioning as international multi-site churches.

In the years to come, successful, larger multi-site churches will continue to embrace an increasingly “glocal” (global + local) view of missions and ministry.³⁴ As a part of this process, multi-sites will transition away from traditional mechanisms of missionary sending agencies toward sending or facilitating teams of church members and

³²Vaughan, *The Large Church*, 100-06.

³³Warren Bird, “The World’s Largest Churches: A Country-by-Country List of Global Megachurches Maintained by Warren Bird, Ph.D. Leadership Network” [on-line]; accessed 15 January 2011; available from <http://innovationlab.leadnet.org/warren/?/world/>; Internet. Examples of the churches on Bird’s list (with location and worship attendance given) include: Yoido Soon-Bok-Eum (Yoido Full Gospel Church) Seoul, South Korea (230,000); Faith Church, Budapest, Hungary (60,000); Living Faith Church (Winner's Chapel), Lagos, Nigeria (50,000); New Life Church, Bombay (Mumbai), India (50,000); Word of Hope Church, Quezon City, Philippines (35,000); City Harvest Church, Singapore (33,812); New Life Assembly of God, Chennai, India (30,000); Christ Commission Fellowship, Ortigas Center, Philippines (25,000); Eunhye wa Chilli (Church of Grace and Truth), Anyang, South Korea (25,000); Sungrak (Holy Joy) Baptist Church, Seoul, South Korea (23,000); Christian Life Church Kampala, Uganda (22,000); Hillsong Church, Sydney, Australia (21,000); and Light House Chapel, Accra, Ghana (20,000).

³⁴Johnson and Lowry, “25 Ideas and Trends Reshaping the American Church,” 56.

indigenous leaders to plant additional sites or partner churches of the multi-site church.

Conclusion

Since Pentecost, the church has continued to grow and change as the Christian faith has spread around the globe. Some chapters of church history are celebrated as a time of progress and great celebration, and others less remarkably demonstrate stagnancy, strife, and contraction. In the United States today, it appears that the North American church is between chapters. Concurrently, traditional churches in America are generally at plateau or in decline, and a new era of church innovation and multiplication is visible on the horizon.

Ministry activities and structures are never the catalyst for revival and awakening at a given time or a given place. The Spirit of God initiates spiritual activity in the hearts of men and women. At the same time, within God's sovereign plan, he employs people and their works to bring about his Kingdom purposes. Is it possible that the multi-site church structure and movement are intended to facilitate a significant expansion of Christianity in North America? Is it possible that God is using the circumstances, challenges, and priorities of our current cultural context to position the Church for a surge in kingdom expansion? It is very possible. The multi-site church strategy is by no means a "silver bullet" solution to all that ails the Church today. Multi-site is a potent tool, however, that can enable many churches to obey the Great Commission (Matt 28:18-20) more effectively and efficiently.

As I conclude, it is my earnest hope that you have gained a deeper understanding and appreciation for multi-site churches. I pray that from reading this dissertation you will be able to engage more fully the topic of multi-site churches. In the

final analysis, many questions remain about the multi-site church, and as the multi-site puzzle continues to refresh others will need to bring greater clarity to the phenomenon through research and publication. Many more chapters are yet to be written in the multi-site story. Perhaps you will write the next one.

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ABSTRACT

THE MULTI-SITE CHURCH PHENOMENON IN NORTH AMERICA: 1950-2010

Brian Nathaniel Frye, Ph.D.
The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2011
Chair: Dr. Charles E. Lawless, Jr.

This dissertation examines the development of the multi-site church phenomenon in North America from 1950 to 2010. Chapter 1 introduces the multisite church concept, briefly detailing the development of the multi-site movement and the need for investigation of the subject.

Chapters 2 through 4 explore the historical development of the multi-site church movement, highlighting individuals, ministries, trends, and forces contributing to the current multi-site church phenomenon.

Chapter 5 examines the various forms of current multi-site churches presenting a concise and comprehensive taxonomy of multi-site churches in North America. Chapter 6 analyzes key New Testament biblical and theological issues concerning the multi-site church structure, providing a general set of parameters for healthy multi-site application and expression.

Chapter 7 summarizes the content and arguments of the dissertation, assessing the strengths, weaknesses, and success of the dissertation, and presenting topics for future multi-site inquiry and investigation. This dissertation contends that the multi-site church concept is a robust and biblically acceptable church model, and one that is beneficial to the church in North America.

VITA

Brian Nathaniel Frye

PERSONAL

Born: March 8, 1976, Lawton, Oklahoma
Parents: Wes & Donna Frye
Married: Heidi Christine Mumaw, July 3, 1999

EDUCATIONAL

B.A., Oklahoma State University, 1998
M.Div., The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2002

MINISTERIAL

Associate to Freshmen, Baptist Collegiate Ministry, Oklahoma State University, Stillwater, Oklahoma, 1998-1999
Student Minister, Valley Station Baptist Church, Louisville, Kentucky, 2001-2002
Associate Pastor, Valley Station Baptist Church, Louisville, Kentucky, 2002-2004
Campus Director, Christian Medical & Dental Association, University of Louisville, Louisville, Kentucky, 2005
Metro Collegiate Ministry Director, Northwest Ohio Baptist Association, Waterville, OH, 2006-August 2008
Collegiate Evangelism Strategist, State Convention of Baptists in Ohio, Columbus, Ohio, 2008-present

ACADEMIC

Research Assistant, Database of Golf, Department of Geography, Oklahoma State University, 1996-1998
Research Assistant, The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2000-2001
Student Associate, Professional Doctoral Studies, The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2004-2005
Assistant to the Dean of the Billy Graham School of Missions, Evangelism & Church Growth, The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2005-2006
Associate Director, Professional Doctoral Studies, The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2005-2006

